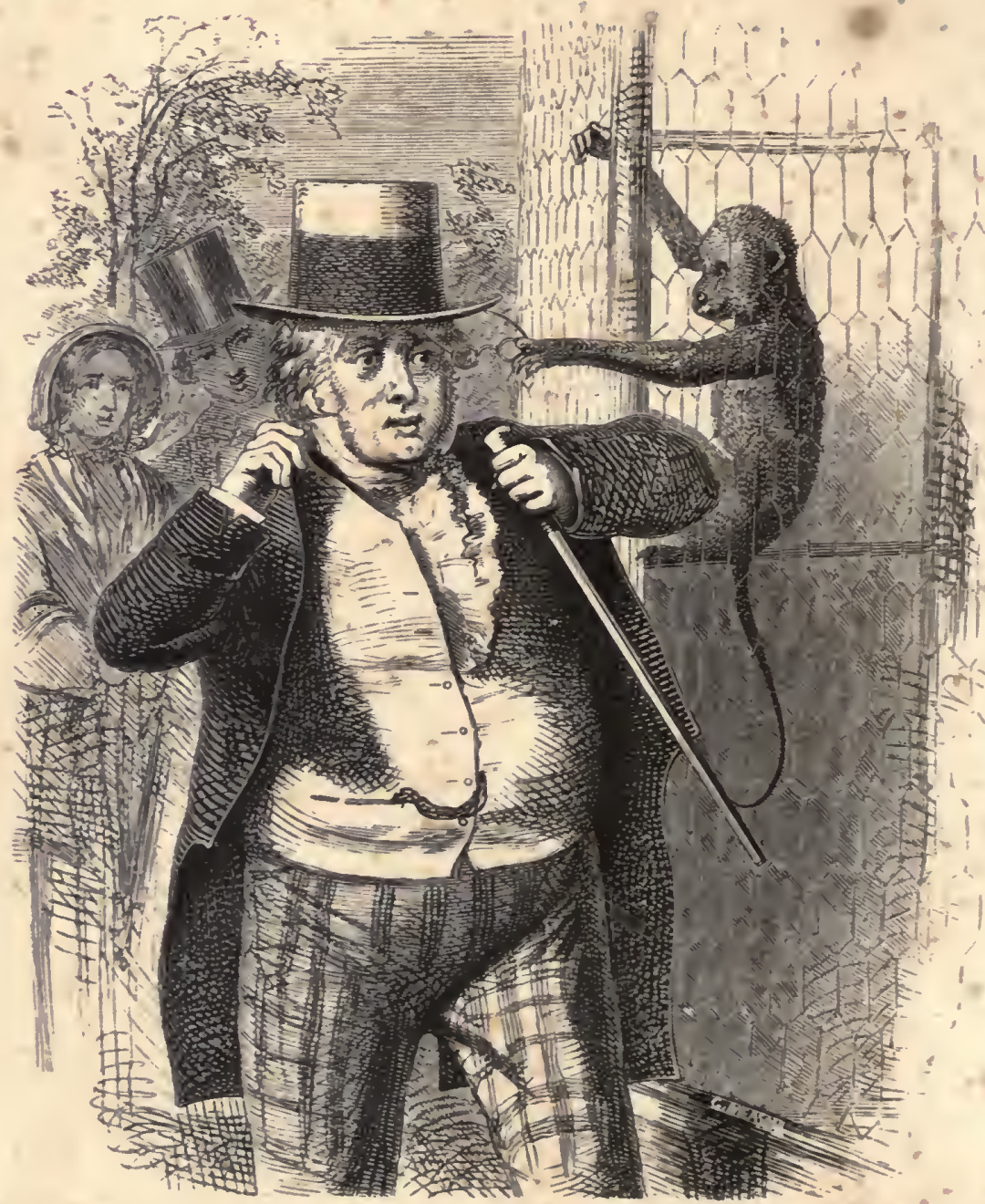
HOLIDAY
RAMBLES

GRANT



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HOLIDAY RAMBLES.



Front.

The monkey stealing the gold spectacles.—P. 64

HOLIDAY RAMBLES:

OR,

PEEPS INTO THE BOOK OF NATURE.

BY

ELIZABETH GRANT.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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PREFACE.

In submitting this little book to the perusal of her young friends, the Authoress is actuated by a wish to attract their attention to the study of nature—one of the most interesting that can occupy the mind: presenting infinite variety, and disclosing infinite perfection.

It is the earnest wish of the writer of the following pages, that those who read them may experience the same delight in contemplating the wonderful works of God, which she has felt, whilst enjoying a quiet ramble in the lovely lanes and woods that abound in this our beloved and beautiful country.

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HOLIDAY RAMBLES.

CHAPTER I.

It was the commencement of the Midsummer vacation, when little Helen Melville placed herself at the window, anxiously waiting the return of the carriage from the Station, where it had been sent to meet her two brothers, George and Walter, who were coming from school by the mail train that morning. Mrs. Melville was sitting at work, and Agnes, her eldest daughter, was busily engaged finishing a frock for Dame Goodenough's little baby.

"Here they come down the hill," cried Helen, "there is George waving his hand, and Walter by the side of papa." Agnes and her mamma started up to see the tra-

vellers, and they all proceeded to the hall to welcome them.

"Oh! dear mamma," said George, springing into his mother's arms, "how delighted I am to see you, and Agnes, and Helen, and all at my own dear home."

After these mutual congratulations were ended, the boys found time to return the caresses of a beautiful Newfoundland dog, named Neptune. He was a great favourite, and expressed his delight by jumping upon his young masters, and rolling over and over a pretty little spaniel, called Rover, who was rather annoyed by the rough gambols of his companion. In due time, however, they quietly seated themselves to enjoy some refreshment after their journey, and to hear and relate what had happened during their absence.

After luncheon, the children went out to visit the garden, and their numerous pets. Both the girls had worked hard to keep

their brothers' gardens in order; and the pleasure George and Walter expressed at finding them in such nice condition, amply repaid their sisters for all their trouble. The roses were coming into beautiful bloom; the carnations were tied up, each blossom separately, the finest with a round piece of cardboard under the flower, to keep the calix from bursting, and Agnes had contrived some little shades, fastened on sticks, to shelter them from the sun.

They then went to see the ducks and chickens. Walter was delighted to find his white duck, Lily, had a brood of thirteen little ducklings, and counted five of them white, like the old one; the rest were dark. George's guinea-hen was sitting on fifteen eggs, and would not hatch them for a fortnight. After giving the poultry some barley, they proceeded to the field, to see Frisk, the little pony, who, as soon as he saw them coming, trotted to meet them.

"How are you, my old friend?" said George, stroking the nose of the gentle creature. "I hope we shall have many walks together, this summer; do you think mamma will join us in our expeditions, as she did last year, Agnes?"

"Yes," replied Agnes; "mamma says to-morrow she will take us to see Dame Goodenough. She must ride Frisk, and we must walk by her side. Perhaps, if she is not too tired, we can go on to Wilton."

"That will be delightful," said George. "How kind mamma is; I dearly like a walk with her."

"I hope," said Agnes, "Frisk will behave better, when he goes out with mamma, than cousin Harry's pony, Dick, did, when he carried the panniers to the pic-nic last month. Did you hear of it, George?"

"No," replied George, "I have not heard anything about it. Do tell me, Agnes, the whole story."



Dick running away with the dinner.—P. 11.

"Aunt Howard proposed to have a pic-nic to Oakdale, and invited many friends to join her. There were the two Misses King, and their brothers, John and William, Mr. and Miss Sloper, and many others I did not know, making in all a party of twenty; besides our cousins Jane, Mary, Harry, and Tom."

"Did you go, Agnes?" inquired Walter.

"Mamma could not go with us," said Agnes, "and she did not like us to go without her; but I must continue my story. The provisions were all packed in two panniers, and Dick was to carry them. Joe, the little foot-boy, drove the pony, and was desired to keep him some distance behind the rest of the party. At first Dick behaved very well, but just as he came to the steep hill, at the entrance of Oakdale, a gun went off the other side the hedge, and he started at full speed down the hill, to the great astonishment of the

good people who were quietly walking in front. The ladies ran screaming to the hedge on either side, and some of the gentlemen did the same. Harry and Tom tried to stop the pony, but in vain; he ran so fast, he was unable to stop, and the panniers coming in contact with some of the party, they were knocked down, and treated to a roll in the dust."

"Were they at all hurt?" asked Walter.

"Oh, no!" said Agnes, "they only made their coats dusty, and soon regaining their feet, joined in the race after their dinner, which was just then in a very dangerous situation; but it was not much use. Dick only trotted the faster for the noise they made in the pursuit, and did not stop till he came to the turnpike."

"How I wish I had seen the chase," said Walter; "it must have looked very droll; Dick running first, with all the good things in the panniers, and all the

hungry folks travelling after, as fast as they could."

"Harry told me," continued Agnes, "that he could not run for laughing. On the top of one of the panniers was a nice custard pudding, and every now and then an extra bound of Dick's would send a portion of it splash into the road. When they came to open the covering was the greatest fun—the shouts of laughter—as one thing after another came out. The veal pie made its appearance with a cucumber imbedded in the crust; the salt was upset over the gooseberry tart; the mustard alighted on the rhubarb pie; the pepper covered the ham; the sugar was scattered over the tongue, and the fowl found a resting-place in a dish of jam tarts; many of the plates and dishes were broken, and some ginger-beer, that went off without leave, soaked a loaf of bread."

"The only thing that was quite free from

damage," said Helen, "was a bread and butter pudding, baked that morning; as it was not cold, Tom took it to a stream of water near, and left it to cool, till the meat was eaten. When pudding time came, he went to fetch it, and, to his great dismay and disappointment, found that a dog, belonging to one of the party, had made free with a large portion of it."

"Well done!" said Walter; "why they could hardly have found enough to eat."

"I wish I had been there," said George; "it must have been a very merry party."

"According to Harry's account, there was plenty of fun," said Agnes; "but one or two of the party did not quite like such a practical joke. Miss King was very much annoyed with Tom for handing her some cake over which the vinegar bottle had burst. He declared he did not know it was touched by the vinegar, but she would not speak to him all the rest of the day."

"How silly," said George; "why every one was liable to the same, and the best thing to be done was to laugh at such a misfortune."

"So the rest thought," replied Agnes, "and they all said they enjoyed Aunt Howard's pic-nic."

"We had something of the same kind last monthly holiday," said George. "Mr. Ross took us to Rowley Common, to spend the day, and I assure you we had fine fun. All our cricket-bats and balls were put into a cart, with the good things, and Mr. Ross drove. When we arrived on the common, the elder boys had a game of cricket before dinner. I played till I was knocked down by a ball, which struck me on the shoulder."

"You never told us of your accident before," said Agnes; "were you much hurt?"

"It was very painful at the time," said George, "but soon got well. It was not

worth while to make dear mamma uneasy for such a trifle."

"Did Walter join in your game?" asked Helen.

"No," replied Walter; "I played at Hare and Hounds, and Follow my Leader. You would have been much amused to have seen all the chases we had. Tom Grant was the Leader, and he led us a pretty dance over the furze bushes, and round the trees. Many of the boys came down on their knees in the middle of a bunch of very prickly furze they could not jump over; others rolled into the nettles. I fell flat down in a large bunch, and stung my face very much; but it would not do to be left behind, so, gathering a dock-leaf, I held it to my cheek, and ran as fast as I could. At last Tom came to a ditch, and as he was the best jumper in the school, he leaped over it with ease; but Frank Green, trying to follow him, came short of the opposite

bank, and sank up to his waist in the mud and water of the ditch."

"Poor fellow," said Agnes, "I hope you helped him out, Walter."

"Oh, yes!" replied Walter, "we soon helped him out; but you cannot think what a funny figure he cut. We were obliged to scrape the mud from his clothes with our knives."

"Did he not take cold?" asked Helen.

"No," replied Walter; "there is a cottage at the side of the common; we took him there, and wrapped him in a blanket, whilst the good woman very kindly washed and dried the parts of his dress that were dirty."

"I suppose he did not much like staying quietly in-doors, while the rest of the party were enjoying themselves?" said Agnes.

"He grumbled a little," said Walter, "at losing the fun; but when we went to see if he was ready to join us, we met him at the

door, and four of the big boys gave him a good tossing in the blanket."

"What a shame!" said Helen, "to serve the poor fellow like that."

"He enjoyed the fun as much as the rest," said George; "but the best of the joke was, that, as we were tossing him very high, crack went the blanket, and he all but came through on the ground."

"I hope you gave the poor woman another blanket," said Agnes.

"Mr. Ross came just at the time," replied Walter, "and he said it would be but right to make a subscription to pay for the blanket; so we all helped, and, with his contribution, there was enough to buy a pair of blankets, instead of one."

"I am glad the poor woman was not a loser by your fun," said Agnes.

"Oh, no!" replied Walter. "She said she hoped we should come again, and, if we wished another tossing, we should have

one of the new blankets, that would be stronger."

"I think," said Agnes, "we must go in, or we shall not be ready for dinner. Your amusing tales have made us forget the time. Hark! there is the dinner-bell."

CHAPTER II.

Next morning, directly after breakfast, Frisk was saddled, brought to the door, and Mrs. Melville, accompanied by the children, set off to visit Wilton Farm, and take Dame Goodenough the frock Agnes had made for little Jane. Neptune and Rover were also in attendance; and Helen took her basket to carry any treasures she might find. The road to Wilton was up a steep hill, and over a down, where they were delighted by listening to the song of the sky-lark, and watching it as it rose, warbling upon the wing, raising its note as it soared, until it seemed lost in the immense height above, the song continuing, the bird itself unseen; then descending with a swell, as it comes from the clouds, yet sinking by degrees, as it approaches its

nest, the spot where all its affections are centred, the spot that has prompted all its joy.

"Listen to that happy little bird," said Mrs. Melville, "how joyously it is carolling forth its Maker's praise."

"I wonder where its nest is," said George.

"Not far from it," replied Mrs. Melville. "The lark builds its nest upon the ground, beneath some turf, that serves to hide and shelter it."

"Can you tell me, dear mamma, how many eggs the lark lays?" asked Agnes.

"She lays," answered Mrs. Melville, "four or five. They are of a dusky colour; and she sits a fortnight before they are hatched. During this time her mate is most attentive, and cheers her with his song. Rising to an imperceptible height, he keeps his loved partner in view, nor once loses sight of his nest, either in ascending or descending."

"I wonder the nest is not destroyed," said Walter: "it is very dangerous to build it on the ground. Why does not the lark choose some high tree or wall?"

"The more closely we examine the order of nature," replied Mrs. Melville, "the more we shall be struck at the wonderful adaptation, or fitness, of every animal, bird, and insect, to the place it has to occupy in the animal creation; and I wish you, my dear children, to notice how each separate creature exhibits the goodness, love, and power of its Almighty Creator. The lark is taught, by that unerring power implanted in its nature by the great God, and which is called instinct, to select materials for her nest, so much resembling the ground around in colour, that, at a very little distance, you would not discover it. The formation of its foot renders the lark unable to rest on a tree; the hind claw is very much lengthened, and would be much in

the way should it attempt to grasp a stick. Indeed, it can only stand on the ground, or a flat surface."

By this time they had passed the down, and entered a pretty lane abounding with wild thyme and harebells. A little further on they came to a road, said to have been used by the Romans, and which was exceedingly rough. The children much wished to go this way; George promised to lead Frisk, and guide him safely. Mrs. Melville consented to trust herself to his care; and the surefooted little animal carried her with the greatest caution, avoiding all the stones and ruts.

The village of Wilton was situated in a beautiful valley; and the side of the hill our party were now descending consisted of rich corn and clover fields. The road they traversed was almost overshadowed by trees; the hedges had not for many years been cut, and gave a cool and refreshing

shade; while the view they occasionally enjoyed of Wilton Park on the opposite hill, the brilliant green of the after-grass (for it had just been mown), contrasting with the dark shadow of the woods that bounded it on one side, and studded with clusters of trees, in which the airy foliage and light tint of the larch were contrasted with the more sombre but scarcely less beautiful, massive dark green of the Scotch fir, and the majestic height of the elm and oak, with the graceful drooping of the lime, and the luxuriance of the horse-chesnut. The Roman road traversed by our friends, terminated in a large field, through which the canal wound its peaceful track. The children entreated their mamma to let them stay here a short time, to gather some beautiful forget-me-not, which grew on the banks of the canal. Mrs. Melville consented; and, dismounting from her trusty little palfrey, sat down under a large plane

tree, on a seat of turf George had covered with a cloak his mamma used, in preference to a habit, when she rode the pony; and Frisk was set at liberty to eat as much grass as he liked. After gathering enough forget-me-not to fill Helen's basket, the children returned to the place where Mrs. Melville was resting.

"Oh! mamma," said Walter, "see what I have found; what is it? I had so much trouble to catch it: when I thought I had covered it with my hat, it gave a jump, and went so far."

"It is a grasshopper, my dear," said Mrs. Melville, "and a very fine one. Look at its beautiful wings; see how bright its colour: it is a brilliant green. Now sit down, and we will talk a little about its history, before we go on to the farm." The children were delighted at their mamma's proposal, and quickly seated themselves around her, for it was one of

their greatest treats to listen to the anecdotes and histories Mrs. Melville related to them. George placed himself at his mamma's feet, Neptune lay by his side, and Helen took Rover in charge, as he was apt to hunt about among the grass, and bark at any one that passed.

"Now, dear mamma," said Agnes, "we are all ready; will you be so kind as to tell us the history of the grasshopper?"

"With pleasure," replied Mrs. Melville. "The insect Walter has found is one of the largest kind that is a native of this country. The eggs from which the grasshoppers are produced are deposited by the female in a small cell in the earth; they are oval in form, white, and of the consistency of horn; each female depositing some hundreds. These are produced in the autumn, and continue, uninjured by the severity of the winter, till the genial warmth of spring enlivens and hatches them."

"How much they must increase," said George. "If one grasshopper lays several hundred eggs one year, and next year these hundreds deposit several hundreds more, I wonder we are not overrun by them."

"You need not, my dear George," said Mrs. Melville, smiling, "be at all alarmed at the idea of being overrun by these little insects; but I would have you remark the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, in that He has rendered them so productive. You must consider how many enemies the little grasshopper has: many birds eat them; the hedgehog and the mole prey upon insects, and, no doubt, destroy many grasshoppers. It is therefore necessary, both to provide a portion of food for others, as well as to prevent the extermination of the species, that the grasshopper should be able to propagate its kind, on what seems to you such a large scale."

"What are they like, mamma, when they come out of the egg?" asked Helen.

"They are hatched," replied Mrs. Melville, "at the beginning of May. Every egg produces an insect the size of a small fly; these, at first, are white, but soon become a reddish brown. They are formed like grasshoppers, and hop among the grass with great agility as soon as hatched. In this first state, which is called larva, they have no appearance of wings."

"I have often seen them without wings," said George, "but never could understand how it was. I thought they were different insects to those with wings. Please to go on, dear mamma, and tell us some more."

"The next stage of their existence," continued Mrs. Melville, "is called pupa, or nymph, and differs from the first, in having the wings folded up in little cases on the back of the insect. They still hop about, and eat voraciously; but must wait for their

last change before they can use their wings. In these two states the grasshopper exists for nearly a month; it then prepares for its last change; and, bursting its skin, enters a state of greater liberty and enjoyment."

"How does it get out of its coat of mail?" asked Walter.

"It is a difficult task, Walter," answered Mrs. Melville; "but that great Being, who appointed the various changes this little insect undergoes, strengthens it to survive them, and instructs it to take the proper means to guard against accident or injury. When the grasshopper feels its last change approaching, it seeks a convenient place beneath the drooping leaves of some thorn, or thistle, that it may be sheltered from wet, should a storm come on during the time it is freeing itself from its old covering. It uses violent exertion to disengage itself, by swelling its head and neck, and drawing them in again. At last the skin bursts: the head

comes forth first; by continued effort the other parts follow successively; and the little creature, with its long feelers, legs, and all, works its way from the old skin, leaving that fixed to the thistle or thorn."

"Is the new skin, that it comes out in, as hard as the old one, mamma?" asked George.

"No, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville. "When the grasshopper first leaves its old skin, it is soft and tender; by degrees it hardens, as the moisture with which it is covered dries; and in a short time assumes the hardness and colour of the one before us."

"How wonderful it is," remarked Agnes, "that the grasshopper should be able to pull these long legs from its old skin without breaking them."

"It is, indeed, wonderful," said Mrs. Melville; "it is one of the wonderful works of God. And to trace His hand in the forma-

tion of His creatures, is the proper end of the study of nature: these long legs are given the grasshopper to enable it to leap over the grass."

"You have not told us, mamma, what the grasshopper feeds on," said Walter.

"Its food is grass and tender plants," answered Mrs. Melville.

"Mamma," said Agnes, "is this insect at all like the locust we read of in the Bible?"

"Yes, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville: "the locust and grasshopper belong to the same class of insects, but the locust is much larger and more powerful than the grasshopper; and is not a native of this country."

"Will you please to tell us something more about it?" said Helen.

"Willingly, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville. "Tell me, Agnes, where this insect is spoken of in the Bible."

"I think, mamma," answered Agnes, "the account of the eighth plague God sent on Pharaoh, and the Egyptians, is the first time the ravages of locusts are described in the Bible."

"It is so," said Mrs. Melville. "Can you tell me, Walter, why that plague was sent, and where the narrative is to be found?"

"Yes, mamma," replied Walter: "the history of the plagues of Egypt is in Exodus; I think the plague of locusts is written in the tenth chapter. Were they not sent to punish Pharaoh, king of Egypt, for his disobedience in not letting the children of Israel depart, according to the command of God, and for his hardness of heart?"

"They were, my dear," said Mrs. Melville; "and the ravages they committed were dreadful. It is said, 'They covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees, which

the hail had left; and there remained not anything green on the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt.' In other parts of the Bible, the visitation of locusts, by the command of God, is threatened for disobedience to His law. Moses, in delivering the curses on the Jews, should they forsake the worship of the Lord, says, 'They shall carry much seed out into the field, and shall gather but little in, for the locust shall consume it.' And again, 'All thy trees, and thy fruit, shall the locust consume.' In prophetic language, the overrunning of a country by locusts is typical of invasion from hostile armies."

"When it is said, that John the Baptist ate locusts and wild honey, does it mean the same insect you are describing, mamma?" inquired Agnes.

"It is thought by some people," replied Mrs. Melville, "that the locust, used as food by John the Baptist, was a plant so called;

but I can see no reason why it should not be the insect : it is likely they were eaten by the Jews, for Moses, when enumerating, in the book of Leviticus, the clean animals they might eat, specifies four different kinds of locusts."

"Do any other nations eat them, mamma?" inquired Helen.

"Yes, my love," replied Mrs. Melville, "the inhabitants of the various countries this destructive insect frequents, compensate themselves, in some degree, for the ravages they commit, by subsisting on them in turn. In many places they are brought to the market for sale. The Bedouins roast them on the coals; in addition to this, the Arabs steep them in butter. The inhabitants of Morocco dry them on the roofs and terraces of their houses; they eat them either smoked or boiled, and esteem them so highly, that the price of provision falls when the locusts visit the neighbourhood. The Hottentots, as

well as many African tribes, grind them into a sort of flour, which they make into bread."

"Does the locust go through the same stages as the grasshopper, mamma?" asked George.

"Exactly the same, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville, "but they differ in some other things. The locust is much larger and more destructive than the grasshopper; they are also gregarious, or live together in great numbers."

"Are they very destructive before they can fly?" inquired Agnes.

"They are equally voracious, if not more so," answered Mrs. Melville, "in the two first states of their existence, as when arrived at perfection. As soon as they leave the egg, they arrange themselves in bands, and march towards the sea, demolishing, in their progress, every green thing that comes in their way, and keeping their ranks like men of war."

"What do they do if they come to a house, mamma?" asked Helen.

"They climb over it, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville; "no obstacle will stop them. The poor people of the country try to destroy them, by digging ditches, and filling them with fire-wood; but the locusts pour in, till, by numbers, they extinguish the flames, and cross over the dead bodies of their companions. They rest at night, and remain clustered on the tufts of grass, or shrubs, and many of them are killed by driving flocks of sheep over them. It is when the locusts have acquired wings they are most formidable; a swarm of them appears at a distance, like a black cloud, which, as it approaches, almost hides the light of the sun, and woe to the unfortunate country on which they alight. They ravage the meadow and the pasture land; strip the trees of their leaves, the garden of its beauty. The visitation of a few hours

destroys the expectation of the year, and a famine too frequently ensues."

"What dreadful creatures they must be," said Walter. "Do they ever come to this country, mamma?"

"Not in any numbers, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville; "we are mercifully preserved from such a heavy judgment as a visit from a flight of locusts would be. In 1748, a few individuals were seen in several parts of England; they occasioned a great deal of talk, but did no mischief; and, within the last few years, some have been picked up in the city of Bath."

"Thank you, dear mamma, for the interesting account you have given us," said Agnes; "I had no idea the history of the locust could amuse us so much."

"I wish you to gain more than amusement from what I have told you, my love," replied Mrs. Melville; "I want you to recognise the hand of God in directing the

marches of the locust. They are His scourge, with which He corrects nations for their iniquities. He calls them, 'My great army, which I sent amongst you;' and truly they are a great army, marshalled by His Almighty power, and guided by His hand.

"I think it is now time to move on. George, will you call the pony?"

CHAPTER III.

At the commencement of this conversation, Frisk was quietly feeding on the shrubs and grass that grew near the plane tree. Being much interested in the subject under consideration, no one had for some time paid any attention to the movements of the little creature, and when George went to call him, he was rather surprised at seeing Frisk at the top of the hill, in the very act of getting through the hedge into a wheat field. George and Walter directly ran to prevent his breaking bounds; but, owing to the steepness of the field, they did not arrive at the top until Frisk had made his way through the barrier, and was regaling himself, very much to his own satisfaction, on the sweet young wheat. The boys followed through the gap, and went to catch him, as

usual; but Frisk, as if conscious that he was doing wrong, would not be caught, and ran off through the middle of the field. They did not like to follow him, fearing they should hurt the corn; so, walking round by the hedge, they, after a time, succeeded in catching the runaway, and bringing him to the place through which he entered. George took the end of the bridle, and going first, pulled Frisk after him. Walter followed, and they soon arrived safely at the bottom of the field, where Mrs. Melville and the girls were anxiously waiting for them.

"What could make Frisk behave so badly?" said Agnes, when she had heard the account of the chase. "He generally stays very quietly near us."

"I hope he has not been taking lessons from Dick, Harry's pony," said George.

"Next time it would be better to fasten him to a tree, my dear," said Mrs. Melville; "he must not be allowed to trespass in

corn fields. I fear he has injured the wheat."

"No, mamma, I do not think he did much harm," replied George. "He made a path through the corn, but the next shower will cause it to rise again; and Walter closed the gap in the hedge with some thorns."

"I am glad you so carefully repaired the mischief, my dears," said Mrs. Melville, as she remounted her little pony.

Leaving the canal, and the pleasant field through which it passed, our party proceeded on their way to Wilton Farm. On their arrival, Dame Goodenough came out to meet and welcome them; Mrs. Melville dismounted and accompanied the good woman into the house, followed by the children. Frisk was fastened to a post under the shade of a large walnut tree. Neptune was admonished to lie quietly under the table; George gave him one of his

gloves to take in charge, and Helen kept Rover by her side.

After many inquiries, Agnes gave the frock she had made for the little girl, but could not receive her thanks, as the little creature was quietly enjoying a sound sleep in the cradle. Whilst they were talking, Rover slipped from beside Helen, and she was alarmed by hearing a noise behind her. On turning to discover the cause of the commotion, she saw Rover very intently looking, and pointing at something in a basket.

"Don't be frightened, Miss Helen," said Dame Goodenough; "that is only Muff, the poor cat. She is a very useful creature, and is nursing two little ducks."

"You do not mean to say that she has two live ducks in her basket?" said George, with surprise.

"Yes, sir, she has. There they are," replied the Dame, taking up the cat, and

showing them two little ducks, one white, and the other dark, in the basket; "these poor little things remained too long in the water this morning, and got the cramp, so we brought them in to Muff, to take care of. When she has warmed them enough I will take them out to their mother."

The children expressed much astonishment and admiration at the docility of puss, and taking Rover away, they put him on a chair, giving him strict orders not to move. Just then Farmer Goodenough came in, and, after paying his respects to Mrs. Melville, asked the young people if they would like to look over the farm, and see his stock. They willingly agreed to go, if their mamma had no objection. Mrs. Melville kindly consented, charging them to come back in half an hour, as it would then be time to return home. George looked at his watch, and promised to be the time-keeper, and bring back the rest of the party, as his mamma desired.

They first went to the poultry yard, to see a fine brood of guinea chicks that morning come out of the nest; these they admired very much, and gave them some food. They then went to the pond, to see the geese and ducks swimming about. A brood of ducks, that had been hatched under a hen, took the water as well as the others, and the children were much disturbed to see the distress of the poor hen, as she ran from side to side of the pond, calling her foster children. The old goose and gander took great care of their young family, and gliding about in the water, looked much more graceful than when waddling on the land. The farmer threw some corn to the chickens, when the whole party in the pond came flying, quacking, and tumbling, to secure their share of the food, much to the amusement of the children.

They then went to see a litter of pigs, three weeks old. Walter was delighted

with them, and counted ten, four black, two white, and the rest black and white. Farmer Goodenough put some barley-meal and whey into their trough, and the children were much struck to see what greedy little creatures they were.

"I hope," said Walter, "I shall never be greedy like these pigs; how they are pushing one another to try to get the best and most. They must hurt each other, or they would not squeak so loudly. I wish Master Harding could see them; I think it would cure him of gluttony."

"Hush, Walter," said Agnes, "we must not speak ill of the absent. Let us rather learn the hatefulness of gluttony, the pleasure of giving to others, and living together in love and peace."

"What you say is very true, Miss Agnes. I often turn away with disgust from those greedy creatures to my old friend here," said Farmer Goodenough,

patting the head of a fine sheep-dog, which had accompanied them in their walk; "he always stops when I feed him, to kiss my hand in thanks, before he eats a bit."

"Pretty creature," said Helen. "What is its name?"

"I call him Oscar, Miss Helen," said Farmer Goodenough. "He is a very valuable dog; he goes to the hills with me, and will single out of the flock any sheep I name, and bring it to me."

"How can he know them apart, among so many?" said George.

"Why, sir, I believe Oscar and I know every sheep in the flock. I often think, when I am out with them, of those words that are applied to our blessed Saviour, in the 40th chapter of Isaiah, and the 11th verse: 'He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with

young.' How beautifully the care Christ takes of His people is here expressed, under the image of a tender shepherd: how He tends them, and bears with the young and weak; and how fit the emblem chosen to represent His children—a flock of sheep. I am sure my sheep need great care to prevent them from straying, and to guard them from injury, for they are of all animals the most unfit to take proper care of themselves: if one goes through the hedge, all the rest are sure to follow, though they may leave half their fleece on the thorns. I should like to show you some of the lambs, they are such playful little creatures."

So saying, he led the way across the yard to a field where nearly a hundred lambs were frisking about. The children were much amused at their gambols, and would have watched them much longer had not George looked at his watch, and

found it was time to return; so they bent their steps towards the house, looking in to see the calves on their way, and thanking the farmer for the trouble he had taken in showing them all the creatures. When they arrived at the house, they found Mrs. Melville waiting; little Jane was awake, and dressed in the present Agnes had taken her, but was too shy to have anything to say to them. Neptune brought George his glove, and Rover was delighted to be again allowed to run about. Farmer Goodenough assisted Mrs. Melville to mount her trusty little steed; and when the children had taken another peep at Muff, and said good-bye to Dame Goodenough and little Jane, they ran after their mamma. Farmer Goodenough attended them to the gate, and they proceeded on their way home: it being too late to go to Wilton that day, Mrs. Melville kindly promised to take them when their aunt Emily came.

They much enjoyed their walk home again, talking over all they had seen and heard. Neptune rendered himself useful by carrying the basket, and little Rover ran backwards and forwards in high glee. They arrived at home just in time for dinner, and met Mr. Melville at the gate, coming to look for them, with a letter open in his hand.

"Good news!" said he.

"What is it about, papa?" said George.

"Your dear aunt Emily is coming to-morrow. Is not that good news, George?"

"It is, indeed," said all the children. "Dear aunty, how pleased we shall be to see her."

The dinner-bell rang, and Mr. Melville assisting his wife to dismount, they all went into the house to enjoy the good things provided, with thankful hearts, and appetites much improved by their walk.

CHAPTER IV.

Directly after breakfast, the following morning, the children commenced making preparations for welcoming their aunt, Miss St. Clair. Agnes and George went to gather the best flowers their gardens afforded, and succeeded in finding a bunch of beautiful roses, carnations, geranium, verbena, and myrtle, which they arranged in a vase with great care, and placed on their aunt's-dressing table. Helen and Walter ransacked the strawberry beds, hoping to procure enough ripe fruit for dessert. After they had finished these arrangements, they remembered their aunt would come to look at their gardens almost the first thing: and as the wind had blown down some of the creepers, they all set to work to put things in proper order. George went



Agnes and George's vase of flowers for Aunt Emily.—P. 59.

to the filbert hedge to cut some nice straight sticks, Agnes brought some matting to tie the plants, Helen began to pull up the weeds, and Walter ran for his wheelbarrow to carry them away. As they all worked together, they each helped the other; and in a short time they had completed their task. When they had finished, they went into the house, and entreated their mamma to come and see how busy they had all been. Mrs. Melville willingly consented to accompany them, and they were much gratified at the praise she bestowed on their industry.

"Look, mamma," said George, "is not this a beautiful rose? I struck it from a cutting last year; and Agnes has taken such care of it since I have been away! Is not this a fine blossom?"

"It is, indeed," replied Mrs. Melville. "I think the rose is one of the most beautiful as well as fragrant flowers. It is used

in Scripture as an emblem of our Saviour: we read, in the Song of Solomon, 2nd chapter, 1st verse, 'I am the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the valleys.'"

"Where is Sharon, mamma?" asked Agnes.

"The valley of Sharon," said Mrs. Melville, "is at the foot of Mount Carmel, in the land of Palestine, or the Holy Land, as it is sometimes called. The rose and lily flourish there, with all the splendour and fragrance ascribed to them in the Bible."

"Does the rose grow in any other country?" asked Agnes.

"In Egypt," replied Mrs. Melville, "the rose is cultivated to such an extent, particularly in one province, that to ride through beds of roses for twenty miles together, is no unusual thing."

"How very beautiful," said Helen. "But what good, mamma, are they in such quantities?"

"They are used to make rose water, my dear," answered Mrs. Melville, "and that valuable scent called Atar of Roses. At Cairo this rose water is sold at a penny a quart, and is used after bathing, the bath of rose water costing only sixpence extra. The Atar of Roses is more expensive in England; it is sometimes a guinea a small bottle. At Cairo the same quantity would be one shilling."

"Mamma," said Helen, "now you are out, do come and see my chickens; they are such pretty creatures."

"I am quite willing to accompany you, my love," said Mrs. Melville, "but I cannot stay very long, as it will soon be time to meet your aunt."

Helen led the way to the poultry-yard, and showed her mamma her speckled hen, Gipsy, and a troop of little chicks just hatched. She opened the coop, and let Madam Gipsy and her charge out into the

yard, to enjoy the bright sunshine, and catch the insects that were flying about. Walter brought some food for them, and the children stood to watch the care the old hen took of all the young ones. She would not eat any herself till she had called the little creatures around her, and given them the best. When she thought they had walked enough, she called them to her, and nestled them all under her wings.

"Of what should the care this faithful bird displays for her young ones remind us?" asked Mrs. Melville.

"I think I know what you mean, mamma," said George. "Are you not thinking of our Saviour's words when He wept over Jerusalem?"

"You are right, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville; "I meant those words recorded in St. Matthew and St. Luke, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent

unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.' We may see Christ's tender care of His people illustrated by the similitude of a hen gathering her chickens together. The tenderness and care instinctively displayed by the hen for her young, is a beautiful illustration of our Lord's love to His people. David says, 'How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God; therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings.' Those, and those only, who have taken refuge in Christ, will, when the storms and vicissitudes of this life occur, experience that refuge and support not to be derived from any earthly source. May you, my beloved children, seek an individual interest in that Saviour, whom to know is eternal life; that when assailed by the temptations and trials of this world, you may be enabled

to know the blessedness of flying to Christ as your refuge, and putting your trust under the shadow of His wings."

The conversation was here interrupted by the servant coming to tell his mistress the carriage was waiting. Mrs. Melville then went to meet her sister, and the children, after going round the garden, separated to dress for dinner, and be in readiness to receive their much wished-for visitor

CHAPTER V.

The following morning, at breakfast, Mr. Melville said, "I have some news which I think will interest you."

"Do tell us, papa," said George.

"There has been a fresh arrival of animals at the Zoological Gardens."

"What are they, papa?" inquired Walter.

"I have not seen them," replied Mr. Melville; "but I hear that, first of all, is a young giraffe, a pair of pelicans, an ostrich, an African lion, and some monkeys."

"Oh! dear papa, do take us to see them," said Helen, springing from her chair, and throwing her arms round her papa; "it will be such a treat to go to the Gardens with you."

"Do not be so rough, my dear," said Mr. Melville, gently disengaging the little girl's

arms from his neck, and taking her on his knee. "I have leisure to-day, and shall be happy to take you to the Gardens, especially as your mamma tells me you have been good children, and have given her but little trouble with your lessons. I give you an hour to equip yourselves, and be sure you do not forget some nuts for the monkeys, and bread for the elephant."

The children, greatly delighted with their papa's kind promise, were not long preparing for their excursion. When they were ready, they repaired to the hall, to wait for their papa, mamma, and aunt, who soon joined them; and entering the carriage, they drove off, with happy faces, in expectation of the morning's pleasure.

The Zoological Gardens were at some distance from Mr. Melville's residence, and were much frequented, both for the pleasantness of their situation, and for the beauty of the animals. They were tastefully laid out

in shady walks, smooth grass-plots, enlivened with beds of beautiful flowers, and sweet-scented shrubs. On entering the gardens, they turned to the right, along a wide path, which led to the largest house, containing the lions and tigers. The first den was the abode of a beautiful lion and lioness. The children admired the flowing mane of the majestic animal, and the beauty of his mate. Helen was rather alarmed at such formidable creatures, but being reassured by her father, gained courage to look at the splendid animals.

"Is not a lion more generous and noble in its disposition than a tiger, papa?" inquired George.

"He is generally considered so, my dear," replied Mr. Melville. "The lion is frequently tamed, and exhibits docility and affection for his keeper in a remarkable degree. I remember an anecdote I read some time ago, of a lion in a menagerie at

Brussels, called Danco, whose cage was in want of some repairs. His keeper desired a carpenter to set about it; but when the workman came and saw the lion, he started back with terror. The keeper entered the animal's cage, and led him to the upper part of it, while the lower was refitting. He there amused himself for some time playing with the lion, and being wearied, he soon fell asleep. The carpenter, fully relying on the vigilance of the keeper, pursued his work with rapidity, and when he had finished, he called him to see what was done. The keeper made no answer. Having repeatedly called in vain, he began to feel alarmed at his situation, and determined to go to the upper part of the cage, where, looking through the railing, he saw the lion and the keeper sleeping, side by side. He immediately uttered a loud cry. The lion, awakened by the noise, started up, and stared at the carpenter with an eye of fury;

then, placing his paw on the breast of the keeper, laid down to sleep again. At length the keeper was awakened by some of the attendants, and appearing to feel no apprehension from the situation in which he found himself, he shook the lion by the paw, and then quietly conducted him to his former residence."

"Noble creature!" said Agnes, "how I should like to have seen him sleeping by the side of his master. What is this animal, papa?"

"That is the royal Bengal tiger," replied Mr. Melville. "You see it is striped; and next is a chetah, or hunting leopard."

"What do they hunt, papa?" asked Walter.

"In India and Persia, my dear," replied Mr. Melville, "the chetah is used to capture antelopes and deer. They are so tame and gentle, that they are led in a leash, like greyhounds; but when brought to the hunt-

ing field they are carried either on an elephant or in a cart made for the purpose and drawn by oxen. When the game is in view, the chetah is quickly loosed from his leash, and, as soon as he sees the deer, he drops quietly off the cart, and approaches it with great caution, availing himself of the shelter of every bush that comes in his way. When arrived at a certain distance from his prey, he no longer desires concealment, but, springing forward, in a few bounds generally succeeds in capturing his victim."

After admiring the agile form and beautiful markings of the ocelot, noticing the civet cat, and some more animals of the same kind, our party left that house, and proceeded to the one containing the monkeys. In the centre compartment were several monkeys, of different kinds, some very small, and others large. The children were much delighted with watching their antics, and, throwing some nuts into the cage, enjoyed

the scramble which ensued. One little monkey, with a long tail, put its arm out to reach a bit of biscuit Helen offered it; this was seen by a large Barbary ape, who wished to share in the spoil, but, as if unwilling to venture too near the bars, he caught the little monkey by the tail, and gradually drew it towards himself. The little creature was most industrious in demolishing its booty, and as the ape took it in his arms to reach the cake, popped the last two bits into its mouth, and turning round, chattered defiance at its persecutor.

There were many visitors to the monkey house besides our party, and, amongst the rest, a gentleman, with a large pair of gold spectacles on, and who appeared to be very short-sighted, for he was peering in a most inquisitive manner into the cage. A monkey, with very long arms, seemed much to resent this prying scrutiny. Climbing, unobserved by the gentleman, to a position

on the bars just even with his head, and watching an opportunity when his unconscious victim was stooping, in the ardour of observation, almost close to the cage, he snatched the spectacles from off his nose. It would be vain to attempt describing the scene that ensued; the astonishment and indignation of the gentleman; the chattering of all the monkeys, both little and big, and, I am sorry to say, the laughter of some of the spectators, made a concert of sounds not the most harmonious in the world. The arrival of a keeper quieted the din in some measure, but it was not till the pebbles were separated from the gold part of the spectacles, and the latter was twisted into every shape but the right, that they were taken from their chattering possessor.

At the upper end of the house was a large baboon. To the great delight of the children, the keeper entered his cage, taking with him a small table, an arm chair, and

a cup of tea. The baboon gravely seated himself in the chair, and taking the cup from the table, poured the tea into the saucer, and, holding it in his hands, drank the contents with apparent relish.

"I think," said Mrs. Melville, "we have watched these amusing creatures long enough; let us go and pay a visit to the elephant. Have you anything left to give him, my dears?"

"I have some bread, mamma," said Agnes.

"And I have some biscuits," said Helen. "Will he like them, mamma?"

"I dare say he will, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville. "Whenever I have visited a menagerie, there has always been either an old man or woman in the corner, close by the elephant, with a basket of cakes and gingerbread for sale. Many persons give the sagacious creature some pence, and he directly turns to the basket, gives the

owner the money, and expects something in return."

"Does he know when he is well served, mamma?" inquired George; "or may he be cheated with impunity?"

"It is not easy to cheat him," said Miss St. Clair. "I saw a man give an elephant, who was his customer, only six star-cakes for a penny, instead of eight; but he would not be content till he had the right number."

Whilst thus conversing, they entered the habitation of the elephant. Helen had never seen so large a creature before, and, being frightened when he moved his trunk towards her, kept close to her mamma, and could not be induced to offer him a bit of bread Agnes had given her for that purpose. The elephant was very gentle, and appeared pleased with the bread the children gave him, taking it from their hands with his trunk, then curling it round to put it into his mouth.

Mr. Melville said he could tell them a story, in which the elephant's trunk had been of great use to his keeper.

"Do tell us, papa," said all the children.

"Some years ago," said Mr. Melville, "in one of the travelling menageries, were a pair of beautiful tigers; and one Sunday, when no one was in the show, by some means these animals succeeded in getting out of their den, and, springing upon a lama, soon deprived it of life, and, by the time the keeper entered the place, were making a hearty meal on its carcase. The keeper attempted to capture the ferocious animals, but not succeeding, he only enraged them; and the tiger, leaving his prey, pursued the man. Providentially, he happened to run within reach of the elephant, who instantly wound his trunk round him, and lifting him into his den, placed him where he would be safe from his pursuer. The tiger, lashing his sides with his tail,

crouching for a time, sprang at the keeper; but the elephant was prepared to frustrate his design, and receiving the enraged brute on his tusks and trunk, dashed him, with great violence, to the other end of the arena. Again the savage beast returned to the charge, his eyes flashing fury, and growling defiance. He was received as before by the noble creature, and tossed to a distance. A third time he renewed the attack, and a third time was sent flying through the air. Being knocked, with so much violence, against the barrier three times following, effectually damped his courage, and he slunk off to his den. The noise of the encounter brought plenty of people to the assistance of the keeper, but it was not till both the tigers were secured in their den, that his faithful protector would allow him to depart from his place of refuge."

"How grateful the keeper must have felt

to the noble animal for saving his life," said Agnes.

"He must, indeed," replied Mr. Melville: "but though elephants remember their friends, they never forget those that injure them."

"Indeed they do not," said Miss St. Clair. "It is very dangerous to hurt the elephant. A little boy once gave one an apple, with a pin in it; the elephant swallowed it, and the boy thought no more about it, but went round the show to look at the animals. Coming within reach of the injured creature, he seized the boy with his trunk, and was in the act of lifting him over the rails of his den, when the keeper, attracted by the cries of the terrified boy, interposed and rescued him from his imminent peril."

"What a wicked thing to do!" said Walter. "I hope the naughty boy was well punished."

"The elephant punished him severely," said Mrs. Melville. "It could be no very pleasant sensation to feel himself completely in the power of the justly-enraged animal."

"What would the elephant have done to the boy, aunty, asked Agnes, "if he had taken him into his den?"

"He would no doubt have crushed him to death, my dear," replied Miss St. Clair. "Had not the keeper been near, it would have been the last piece of mischief the boy would ever have committed."

The children were anxious to see the newly-arrived animals; and Mr. Melville seeing the keeper, inquired in what part of the gardens they were placed; the man informed him that the young lion was in the same house with the other beasts of prey; the ostrich and pelicans were with the birds; but the giraffe had met with a sad accident, for as they were bringing it to the gardens, the caravan was overturned, and

the poor creature received a severe injury on its shoulder. The children were much disappointed at not being able to see it; but the keeper told them it was obliged to be laid on its side, and a man sat at its head, day and night, to prevent its moving.

On the way to the aviary, our party passed many deer, antelopes, and goats, that were tethered to the ground. A zebra very much delighted Walter; and a large pond, in which a number of beautiful water-fowl were bathing themselves, attracted the attention of the children for some time.

At the entrance of the aviary were some large macaws, secured by a chain round one of their legs to a stand. In passing one of these, Miss St. Clair accidentally knocked against the stand, and disturbed the equilibrium of its occupier; the bird gave a loud scream, and the other macaws, taking up the note, created such a commotion, that it frightened the children. Little

Helen ran out of the house as fast as she could; her papa followed her, and assuring her that the noise was the worst she had to fear, soon prevailed on her to return, and see the other birds.

The ostrich was a young one, and its feathers were rather dirty, and out of order, from its long journey. The pelicans also appeared rather dingy; but the children were delighted with the elegant plumage and graceful form of the various kinds of storks and pheasants that were walking up and down their cages or basking in the sunshine.

Leaving the aviary, Mr. Melville took them to the place where the different kinds of dogs were kept. A beautiful Esquimaux dog attracted the attention of Agnes, who very much admired his large curly tail. A fine Newfoundland, also, won much upon their good-will by wagging his tail, and taking a piece of biscuit with great gentleness.

"I think," said George, "this is my favourite of all the dogs; that large Thibet mastiff looks so surly; and the greyhound, notwithstanding its beauty, is greedy, and seems to think only of himself, but this pretty creature thanks you for every bit he receives."

"The Newfoundland is, certainly, one of the most interesting species," rejoined Mr. Melville. "There are many anecdotes of his sagacity in saving life. His feet being webbed, much increases his dexterity in swimming; and he will without hesitation spring into the water to rescue his master from drowning. A dog, belonging to a vessel engaged in the Whale Fishery, rendered essential assistance to his fellow-voyagers. On one occasion, seven men were on an iceberg, when it gave way. Six of them caught hold of the bow-ropes; but the seventh sank, the water closed over him, and his comrades concluded he was lost.

The master of the vessel was below at the time, but promptly sprang upon deck, accompanied by his faithful dog. While gazing intently, he observed the head of the sailor above the water. He pointed it out to the dog, and giving the word of command, the noble animal leaped from the bow of the vessel, and swam towards the man, barking, either to express anxiety, or to cheer the man with a prospect of assistance. Before the dog could arrive, the man was picked up, in a state of insensibility, by a boat that came from another ship. Seeing the man was rescued, the dog returned to his own ship; and, when taken on board, his gambols, frisking, and fawning on his master, indicated that, though he had not saved the man, he was aware he had done his duty.

Another of these useful animals belonged to the commander of a ship in the West-India trade. This dog always knew

when land was near; and, for some hours before it was in view, would go to the side of the vessel, snuff the air, wag his tail, and seem much pleased. This was the signal for sending a man aloft; and, in a short time, the shore was sure to be discovered. The captain, retiring from the sea-service, took the dog with him; and going to reside within a few miles of London, he regularly attended the village church on Sundays, accompanied by his dog. When his master was prevented going, the dog, on hearing the bell, would set off alone, walk slowly to the church, lie down in the captain's pew till service was over, and then return quietly home."

"Thank you, dear papa, for your stories," said Agnes. "I always liked dogs; and now they will be higher in my favour than ever."

"It is time to think of returning home," said Mrs. Melville, looking at her watch;

"we have remained here longer than we intended. Come, my dears, you must not stay looking at the dogs any more."

Notwithstanding the reluctance the children felt at leaving the interesting objects that surrounded them, they promptly obeyed their mamma's call, and left the gardens immediately.

CHAPTER VI.

The excursion to Wilton afforded so much gratification to the children, that not many days elapsed before they entreated Mrs. Melville to accompany them to a very beautiful wood about a mile and a half distant.

Having procured his mamma's consent, George soon had the little pony equipped for the expedition, and taking his hat and gloves, took his station at his head, to wait the arrival of Mrs. Melville and Miss St. Clair. Walter, his sisters, and the two dogs, were also quite ready and anxious to proceed on their much wished-for excursion.

Mrs. Melville soon appeared, and, mounting her little palfrey, they all set off in high

glee to the wood of Millgrove. They proceeded through a beautiful shady lane, the trees meeting in many places over their heads, and forming graceful avenues. Occasionally a break in the hedge enabled them to get a view of the picturesque city of C——, which was situated on the opposite hill. After enjoying this refreshing shade for a considerable time, they came in sight of a tumulus, on which the unfortunate Duke of Monmouth is said to have encamped, and which overlooked the wood and village of Millgrove. After descending a steep hill, they arrived at their destination. The wood was in a valley, with a fine trout stream running through it; the hill on one side was covered with beautiful oaks, and as the brush-wood had lately been cut from under them, our party gladly availed themselves of the cool and refreshing shadow afforded by a splendid oak, the monarch of the wood, and, reclining on a bank scattered

over with wild flowers, they amused themselves by watching the numerous insects as they sported in the gloom, or sparkled in the sunbeams that enlivened the shade of the wood. Frisk, as usual, was allowed to regale himself on the surrounding herbage, and the dogs were quietly resting at the feet of their young masters.

"How lovely this wood is!" observed Miss St. Clair. "I really think it increases in beauty every time I come here."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Melville, "so I think; it is a favourite walk of ours. There are so many insects to observe here, and the wild flowers are so beautiful, we never tire of coming."

"Dear aunty," said George, "do just look at that large fly; what is it about?"

"Let us go and see," replied Miss St. Clair, rising, and walking towards the object that excited their curiosity. "It is a large dragon-fly, in search of prey.

Watch how it flies from spray to spray, to secure the insects it lives on."

By this time they were joined by all the party, and they together watched the dragon-fly, as it flitted about amongst the briers and flags that abounded on each side the rivulet, chasing any unfortunate butterfly that happened to come in its way. After watching some time, they saw the dragon-fly succeed in capturing a small white butterfly, and settling on a high branch just opposite our party, began to devour its prey.

Helen had been earnestly observing the chase, and had hoped that some sudden turn of the poor butterfly would place it beyond the reach of its rapacious persecutor, but was much distressed to see the dragon-fly bite off first one wing, and then another, from its unresisting victim, and wanted her aunt to drive it away. Miss St. Clair told her it was the nature of that

species of insect to devour those weaker than themselves. At last the dragon-fly finished its repast, and flew off to another vicinity, much to the delight of the children, who did not wish to see it exercise its prowess in that manner a second time. Again taking their seat upon the bank, they began to talk over what they had just witnessed.

"How very cruel it was of the dragon-fly to kill that pretty white butterfly," said Helen.

"It does appear cruel," said Mrs. Melville, "but it is one of the wise arrangements of God, that, amongst the larger animals, birds, and insects, there should be a class whose nature it is to devour those unable to resist them. Lions and tigers are amongst the carnivorous animals; the eagle, hawk, and owl, are carnivorous birds; the dragon-fly, as well as many others, are carnivorous amongst insects."

"Will you tell us, dear mamma," said Agnes, "something more of the history of the dragon-fly?"

"With pleasure, my love," replied Mrs. Melville. "It is an interesting account, and I think will amuse as well as instruct you."

"Walter, will you keep your little dog still?" said Miss St. Clair. "It is rightly named Rover, for it seems to be always hunting about."

"Yes, aunty, I will. Come, Rover, and sit by my side, and be quiet, if you can," said Walter. "Now, mamma, we are all ready."

"You remember, my dear," said Mrs. Melville, "when I gave you the history of the grasshopper and locust, I told you these insects passed through two stages before they arrived at perfection. Can you tell me the names I used to describe their different states?"

"I think I can, mamma," said Agnes; "you called the first stage larva, and the second pupa, or nymph, did you not?"

"It is so, my dear," continued Mrs. Melville, "and the dragon-fly, in like manner, goes through two transformations before it comes forth a perfect insect. The female dragon-fly deposits her eggs on the water; they sink directly to the bottom, in a mass which much resembles a bunch of grapes."

"Do the dragon-flies live in the water?" asked Helen.

"During the two first stages of their existence, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville, "they remain at the bottom of ponds and streams, taking refuge in the mud, which they much resemble in colour. The head and body of the larva are like the perfect insect; it has six legs, and its feet are armed with sharp claws. The only difference between it and the pupa, or nymph,

is, that the latter has the rudiments, or beginnings, of wings, packed up in little cases on each side of the insect. It is supposed to continue in the water for nearly two years."

"What does it feed on, mamma?" asked George.

"Its food consists of the small animals that inhabit the water," answered Mrs. Melville. "It is a most voracious insect; no prey comes amiss to it, and it will seize an insect with its strong mandibles, and not quit its hold until it has drained all the juices from the body of its victim. When the nymph of the dragon-fly prepares for its final transformation, it leaves its home in the bed of the pond, or river, and, by means of its sharp claws, fixes itself to some reed or twig on the bank."

"How surprising it is," observed Miss St. Clair, "the dragon-fly should seek a place for changing its skin where it will be

protected from harm. I do not think it leaves the water till this period, though it changes its skin several times before arriving at its full growth. The instinct bestowed on it by its beneficent Creator doubtless impels it, as soon as it finds its last change approaching, to select some suitable situation in which to complete its transformation."

"How does it free itself from its old skin, mamma?" asked Agnes.

"In a similar manner to that of the grasshopper," replied Mrs. Melville. "By the swelling of the upper part of the body of the dragon-fly, the envelope is soon distended, and bursts asunder on the back of the head and shoulders; through this opening first the head, and then the legs, of the perfect fly make their exit, whilst the empty covering of the legs continues in its place."

"It must require very violent exertion,"

said Miss St. Clair, "to burst its old covering."

"Yes, it does," resumed Mrs. Melville; "it is obliged to rest. After extricating itself thus far, it hangs with its head downwards, and remains in that position till the parts excluded are, in some degree, dry. It next erects itself, and taking hold of the upper part of the skin with its feet, pulls the part still enveloped further out; then, creeping forward, by degrees it disengages the entire body, and again rests for a time."

"How does the fly spread its wings?" asked George.

"When the fly first comes out of the old skin," continued Mrs. Melville, "they are folded up, and not a quarter the size they are when fully developed. Gradually they expand, their plaits and folds become smooth, the body also insensibly becomes larger and longer, and the limbs acquire their just size and proportions. While the

wings are undergoing this operation of drying and expanding, the insect takes care to keep them from coming in contact with the body, by bending itself into the form of a crescent; for if they were obstructed whilst wet, they could not afterwards be set to rights."

"How many eyes do you think the dragon-fly has, George?" asked Miss St. Clair.

"I have only seen two, aunty," said George, "in any of the flies I have caught; but why do you ask? Have they more?"

"Yes," replied Miss St. Clair: "they have a greater number than you would suppose, George, for the eyes of the dragon-fly are singular pieces of mechanism. The surface of the eye is divided into a net-work, composed of six-sided figures; and it is computed that there are between twelve and thirteen thousand of these in each eye; and each one of these compart-

ments is a distinct and perfect organ of vision."

"Why, aunty, that is like a fairy tale," said Agnes. "Five-and-twenty thousand eyes in the head of one little insect!"

"It is, indeed, astonishing, but it is perfectly true," observed Mrs. Melville. "And we should admire the wisdom and kindness of God in constructing an instrument of such a complex nature as is the eye of the dragon-fly, for the use and preservation of one little creature, enabling it to see, in all directions, those insects on which it feeds."

"They are beautiful creatures," remarked Miss St. Clair. "I like to see them, as they dart about in the sunshine, sparkling like gems, their polished wings reflecting the bright beams in which they revel; and darting after their prey with such rapidity, that the eye is unable to follow the mazy intricacy of their flight."

"Every insect is beautiful," said Mrs. Melville; "and we ought to feel thankful to the Bestower of every good, that He has created such a variety of interesting objects to gratify our taste. The garden, field, hedge, and rivulet, are all animated with a profusion of beautiful creatures, sporting about, and lightly traversing the air in a thousand directions; but it is when we come to study the individual history of insects that we trace the hand of that Almighty Being who, although so great as to fill the universe with His presence, yet condescends to animate the dust of this earth, rendering each creature capable of enjoyment, and filling it with happiness."

Whilst thus conversing, they were startled by hearing Rover barking violently, and Neptune growling. Miss St. Clair, and the children, went to ascertain what was the matter; and, going to a little rising, they saw the two dogs in the middle of a heap of

dead leaves. Rover was barking with all his might, and Neptune trying to take something up in his mouth, every time he touched it drawing his head back again very quickly, giving it a shake as if his nose had been pricked, growling all the time; then he would put out his paw, and give whatever it was a pat, but with no better success; so, seeing his friends coming, he left off his attempts to capture the prize, and went to meet them.

"What can it be?" said Walter. "Look at poor Neptune's nose; it has been hurt. Can you think what it is, aunty?"

"We shall soon see," replied Miss St. Clair, going towards the place where Rover was keeping guard.

"Oh! dear aunty, do not go," cried Helen; "I am afraid you will be hurt."

"Do not be alarmed, my dear," said Miss St. Clair: "there is nothing there that will injure us; it is most likely some little ani-

mal the dogs have found. There, see, it is a poor harmless hedgehog, a creature that will not hurt any one."

"Is that anything alive, aunty?" said Helen. "Why, it looks just like a ball made of thorns."

"What a strange creature," said Walter: "it is perfectly round. Where is its head?"

"If you stay quietly for a short time," replied Miss St. Clair, "you will find it has a head, Walter, for it will unroll itself. Will you go to your mamma, George, and tell her the cause of the commotion? Perhaps she will come to see it also."

"Look, dear mamma," said Helen, running to meet Mrs. Melville; "come and see this curious animal the dogs have found."

"It is an interesting creature, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville; "and I am glad you will have an opportunity of watching it. If George will put my cloak on this stump, we will remain till it unrolls itself."

"The dogs made it curl up," observed Miss St. Clair; "but I think they received more injury than they inflicted. See, poor Neptune's nose is bleeding; Rover was the wisest, although he made the most noise."

"Poor Neptune," said Agnes, patting him, "how could you be so foolish as to attempt to bite the hedgehog? I hope you will be wiser another time, and let such prickly things alone."

The dog looked up, sensible of his young mistress's kindness, and, wagging his tail in thanks for the caution, laid down by her side.

"You will have to wait a long time, Walter," said Miss St. Clair, "if you do not keep that restless little Rover still."

"Come, Rover, lie down here," said Walter; "and, if you can, be quiet for a little while."

They waited very patiently for some time, and the hedgehog began to move.

"Look," said Helen, "it has a snout something like a pig."

"Hush!" said Miss St. Clair; "you will frighten it."

They watched until it was quite unrolled, and had walked away.

"Now, dear mamma," said George, "do tell us something about that odd creature. I think it has given Neptune a lesson not to pry too much. Poor fellow, how is your nose? I hope it will soon be well."

"The hedgehog," replied Mrs. Melville, "is a very harmless little animal, feeding on insects, worms, and roots. It is not capable of running with much speed; but its merciful Creator has amply compensated it for this deficiency by endowing it with the power of contracting its body, as you have seen; and when rolled up in a ball, it may be knocked about without sustaining any injury; and few dogs will attempt to bite it."

"I often think," said Miss St. Clair,

"how plainly we can trace the exercise of a Divine power in the works of nature. It is curious to observe how equally the various instincts and powers are bestowed. Here is the hedgehog, very deficient in the power of escaping from its enemies by speed; but it has another quality given it, which enables it to contract itself into a ball, presenting to its assailants an impenetrable barrier of prickles. It is also capable of passing through a very small space. I have seen one go through a barn-door, at the hinges."

"Was it not hurt, aunty?" asked Helen.

"No, my dear, not in the least," replied Miss St. Clair. "The hinge separated the door from the wall rather more than an inch; and the door was held open whilst the little creature passed through."

"Are hedgehogs of any use, mamma?" asked Walter.

"They are sometimes tamed, and kept

in the kitchen to destroy cockroaches," replied Mrs. Melville. "During the day they hide themselves, and will creep into very small spaces. After dark they come out of their hiding-places, and soon destroy all the insects within their reach. No creature is created in vain. Without doubt this little animal fills its place in the economy of nature, and offers its tribute of praise to its Almighty Creator. We should learn from this instance the duty of consecrating all our powers to the service of our Heavenly Father, who, though He condescends to create such insignificant creatures for use, has endowed us with reason; and, therefore, requires that this reason, together with all our faculties, be dedicated to His service."

CHAPTER VII.

After resting a little longer, our party rose to continue their walk. George called Frisk, and he trotted after them. Then, following the brook, they passed through the wood to a field where they found plenty of wild flowers. The children amused themselves by gathering roses, wild mallow, and many other flowers, twining them into wreaths, with the large white convolvolus, and the tendrils of the wild hop. They crowned each other with these garlands, and after they were tired of this employment, they went up the field, which was very steep, in search of some moss, to complete the arbour Agnes and George had between their gardens. Their baskets were soon filled with beautiful moss, and wishing to take more home than they would hold, George and

Walter took their handkerchiefs, and after making two large bundles of it, they slung them across Neptune's back. The docile creature carried them with great care, and appeared well pleased with his burden.

George was returning to the place where his mamma and aunt were sitting, followed by Neptune and the rest of the party, when, without thinking of what he was doing, he set off at full speed, ran down the hill, and jumped over a bush near the edge of the stream. Neptune, thinking he could not do better than imitate his young master, followed, and, in clearing the hedge, upset the two bundles of moss. Seeing Neptune without his package, George turned to discover the fate of the moss he had collected with so much care, and saw one bundle in the stream, the other caught on a brier. By this time the rest of the children arrived, and Neptune's exploit, and the mischance of the bundle, afforded them plenty of amuse-

ment. After a little while, George succeeded in recovering the lost treasure, and, squeezing the water from the wet moss, they spread it on the grass to dry.

About half way up the steep field visited by our party, was a beautiful ash-tree, under the shade of whose luxuriant branches Mrs. Melville was resting. At her feet flowed the little brook before mentioned, stealing unseen between the flowery banks which, in some places, nearly overshadowed it, reflecting the graceful foliage of the alder and the birch, the silvery brightness of the beech and white poplar trees that decorated its sides. On the hill opposite was a hazel wood, whose shade of light green was occasionally varied by the bright dark colour of the holly, festooned with the wild clematis, and the beautiful violet-coloured vetch.

"How peaceful everything is here," remarked Miss St. Clair; "there is not a

disturbing sound to break the tranquillity of the scene; for we cannot think the song of the birds, or the buzz of insects, calculated to annoy."

"That is some of Nature's music," said Mrs. Melville; "it is far more agreeable to my ear than the noise and bustle of a large assembly. The sound of the grasshopper, the hum of the bee, gathering her store of sweets from every flower, the gay song of the sprightly lark, as he soars on the breeze, the varied notes of the thrush, and the liquid melody of the blackbird, all contribute to awaken emotions in the heart far more conducive to happiness and devotion than the gay promenade, or the fluttering excitement of the dance."

"It is indeed preferable," said Miss St. Clair; "these sylvan sounds tend more to elevate the mind in thankfulness to our Heavenly Father, who called them into existence, than the contemplation of any

of the works of art, however beautiful or varied. It is truly said, 'Man made the town, but God made the country.'"

"The ingenuity of man," replied Mrs. Melville, "is a wonderful talent bestowed on him by his Maker; but not all the skill of the whole human family could produce a specimen that would bear comparison with one of the least of these wild flowers, or a spray of that moss drying before us."

"I remember," said Miss St. Clair, "going to see the hydro-oxygen microscope some time ago, and, amongst the things shown, was a very fine needle, the best made, and the sting of a bee. The needle, though to our natural eyes appearing smooth and faultless, was, when magnified, very rough and blunt; the sting, on the contrary, was perfectly even, and sharpened to an imperceptible point."

"It is well to observe the difference in the works of nature and art," remarked

Mrs. Melville: "the works of God are perfect in every part; the more minute the examination, the greater the perfection discovered; the smaller the insect, the more wonderful its formation. Thus we read, 'All thy works shall praise Thee, O Lord, and Thy saints shall bless thee.' Surely, my dear children, it is our duty—indeed, we should consider it our privilege—to bless and praise that Almighty Being, who has given us such great blessings, having bestowed upon us the power of reasoning and reflecting on the varied works of nature, and has increased our enjoyment and happiness by the multitude of beautiful things around us."

"I do not envy those," said Miss St. Clair, "who think it dull to take a country walk; who can see nothing to admire in the rich foliage, green meadows, and refreshing shade, found in the various walks that surround this neighbourhood."

It was now time to think of returning home; the moss was dry enough to be again packed, and Neptune, after receiving a caution not to jump over any more bushes, was laden as before. Mrs. Melville walked to the entrance of the wood (the rugged ground rendering it unsafe to ride), where she again mounted her little pony. They then retraced their steps towards home, arriving just in time for dinner.

In the evening the children went into the garden, to arrange the moss in the arbour. George had nailed some barked oak sticks across the roof, from one rafter to another, and mounting some garden steps, which enabled him to reach, he placed the moss where they wished it to be, Agnes assisting, by handing her brother the moss as he wanted it. When the roof was finished, they trained the jessamine, honeysuckle, and rose, up the trellis work at the sides. After sweeping the rubbish from the floor,

dusting the seats, and making it all very neat, the children went to invite their mamma and aunt to look at their work, and rest in the bower.

Mrs. Melville and Miss St. Clair admired the arbour much, and thought the children had shown much taste in its arrangement.

"I think, my dears," said Mrs. Melville, "the moss is a great improvement to the arbour, and am glad to see my children take such an interest in their gardens."

"Look, mamma," said Agnes, "when this bunch of sweet peas and these convolvulus-majors are in blossom, it will be quite gay. George and I have spent many hours together here since his return home."

"Those have been happy hours, no doubt, my dear," said Miss St. Clair; "exercise in the open air always exhilarates and strengthens the body; when you have a motive for action, it obliges the mind to act in unison with the body. You have both

taxed your ingenuity in the construction of this bower."

"It is a joint concern, aunty," said George; "I did the hard work, Agnes the fine, and we both consulted about the plan."

"It does you both credit, my dears," said Mrs. Melville; "I hope I shall always see my dear children willing to help each other, and living in love and unity. Remember the wise man, 'The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water; therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with,' and never allow yourselves to quarrel."

They continued their conversation till the sun was below the horizon, and some of the night insects were flitting from tree to tree, in the deepening twilight. Mrs. Melville fearing the damp of the rising dew, they left their peaceful retreat, and returned to the house, much gratified with the pleasures of the day.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FEW days after the walk to Millgrove the children were sitting in the arbour, busily engaged. Agnes was knitting a pair of baby's shoes; Helen employed herself in making a new frock for her doll; George and Walter were preparing some pieces of wood to mark their geranium cuttings.

"I wish," said Helen, "mamma would let us take our tea under the lime-tree this evening."

"So do I," said Walter. "Would you like it, Agnes?"

"Very much indeed," replied Agnes.

"It would be very pleasant," remarked George.

"Here is dear aunt Emily coming down the steps," said Agnes; "let us consult her about it."

"On what subject do you wish to consult me?" said Miss St. Clair, as she entered the arbour.

"We want to have tea under our favourite lime-tree this evening, aunty," said George; "will you tell us how to manage it?"

"Willingly, my dears," replied Miss St. Clair. "In the first place, you must clear the ground under the tree from all the stones and sticks."

"That can soon be done," said Agnes, "but what shall we do for seats?"

"You can take an arm-chair out of the library for your mamma," replied Miss St. Clair; "and I should think some footstools and shawls would make very good seats for you."

"Oh, yes!" said Helen, "we could sit on the ground, or anything."

"What must we have for a table, aunty?" asked Walter.

"Do you think we could do without one?" inquired George. "We might have the tea-things on a tray, and rest it on the ground."

"That would be a very good way," replied Miss St. Clair.

"I suppose we must have the tea made in-doors, and brought out in the urn," said Agnes.

"It would get cold coming out, and would not be half so much fun as having it made in the field," observed George. "Cannot you think of some plan, aunty?"

"It would be best to boil the kettle, and make it there, certainly," answered Miss St. Clair, "but I fear the fire would injure the grass."

"There is a small piece of ground quite free from turf, close to the tree," said Walter; "do you not think we might make the fire there?"

"Yes, I should think we might," replied

Miss St. Clair. "George, you must find three strong stakes to hang the kettle on."

"How will you hang the kettle on three stakes?" asked Helen.

"They must be fixed firmly in the earth, my dear," answered her aunt, "and then tied together at the top, the same way the gipsies do when they kindle a fire to dress their food."

"Have you ever seen them?" inquired Walter.

"Yes, frequently," replied Miss St. Clair; "a few days before I left home I paid a visit to a camp of gipsies."

"Did you go out on purpose to see them?" asked Helen.

"No," answered Miss St. Clair; "I was walking in one of the most romantic lanes in the neighbourhood, when I came suddenly in view of their encampment. Under a rugged tent, supported by four poles, were a young woman and three beautiful children,

with the most brilliant dark eyes, and long black hair. These directly ran to meet me, begging for a halfpenny."

"Did you give them anything?" inquired Agnes.

"I had no pence with me, but I asked them if they could read; and finding that they knew their letters, I turned to their mother, and offered her some tracts which I held in my hand. She most thankfully received them, and, after a little conversation with her, I proceeded to a miserable hovel, where she informed me her husband was. I pushed the door gently open, but, I confess, I felt more inclined to retreat than advance, for the first objects that attracted my attention were two large bulldogs."

"Oh, aunty! were you not frightened?" asked Helen. "I should, I am sure, have turned round, and run away as fast as I could."

"I was rather startled, my dear; but I knew that my object in entering the hut was to try to benefit its inhabitants, and I felt assured our Saviour, who Himself went about doing good, whilst He sojourned among men, would watch over and protect me in trying to follow His example. On closer inspection, however, I found that I had not so much cause for alarm as I anticipated, the dogs being chained to the wall. I proceeded a little further, and there was a decrepit old woman, dressed in a very torn cloak, which had once been red. The hood was drawn partly over her head, and her long grey locks partially concealed a countenance of the most forbidding expression. She was cowering over a wood fire, as if anxious to secure all the heat, and totally regardless of the smoke that wreathed around her head, in its way to the chimney. On a log of wood were two young men, smoking, and close to them

those formidable dogs, their eyes flashing with fury, and growling in that under tone that made it evident they only waited the word of permission or encouragement from their masters, to have attacked me in no very agreeable manner."

"Did the men say anything to you?" inquired George.

"No, my dear. I spoke to the old woman; inquired how old she was; whether she had always led this roving way of life; if she ever thought of another world; but I could get no reply. I offered a suitable tract, telling her she could not expect to live much longer here, and entreating her to prepare for the world to come, while there was yet time. She looked at me with a gaze of stupid indifference, appearing to be very deaf, and either would not, or could not, understand me. Finding I could make no impression on her, and seeing the men looked uneasy at my presence, and the dogs

still more so, I left, and felt very glad to be again in the pure air of heaven. The smoke from the pipes, in addition to the fire, rendered the atmosphere of the hut almost suffocating."

"Did you say anything more to the pretty children in the tent?" asked Agnes.

"I talked again to the interesting young woman, and offered to send the children to school. She thanked me; but said they were not going to remain long in this place. She had been to school when a girl, and she taught her children to read when she could find time. I did not like to remain talking to her long, as she was cooking the dinner for the family. So giving her all the tracts I had, I took my leave."

"How was she dressing the dinner?" asked Walter.

"There were three strong stakes fixed in the ground, and fastened together at the top; a chain and hook were secured in the

rope that bound the stakes, and the iron pot was suspended over the fire."

"Is that how you intend us to boil the kettle, aunty?" inquired George.

"Yes, my dear; but, before we plan any more, I think it would be best to ask your mamma's consent to the expedition."

Agnes and George offered to go, and ask their mamma, if she had any objection to the proposed party. They soon returned with smiling faces, and full permission to make what arrangements they liked.

The children now repaired to the tree, and began in earnest to make their preparations, their kind aunt accompanying them.

George with his knife cut away the branches that were in the way; Agnes gathered together all the sticks scattered about, and carried them to the place Miss St. Clair had chosen for the fire. Walter brought his wheelbarrow; and Helen assisted him to pick up the stones. In a short

time all was ready to receive the chairs, and other requisites for their comfort.

The lime tree was a favourite resort of the children, and grew in a large meadow belonging to Mr. Melville. It stood nearly in the centre of the field, and was one of the most beautiful trees in the neighbourhood. The trunk was quite straight to about the height of twelve feet, and then branched out in a circle; the end of the boughs drooping gracefully to the ground, enclosing a space as large as a good-sized room, so effectually, that from the field outside the visitors within could not be discerned. The tree, as seen when approaching, was of a conical shape; the branches falling over each other in rich profusion, drooping less, and still less, till the top ones stood erect.

The meadow in which the lime tree was situated was skirted at the bottom by a plantation of the spruce fir; at the top a high

hedge, varied occasionally by an ivy-covered ash, and at one end a beautiful group of elms, completed the boundary. On one side was a hedge, and a row of large ash trees on the other.

The view was one of great beauty and extent; the undulating surface of the ground, the winding of the river, the light and shade of the bright after grass, and the dark wood, the pretty villages spread on the opposite hill, and the clear blue of the distant mountains, all contributed to present a picture to the eye calculated to give pleasure, and excite admiration. The preparations were just completed, the chairs, stools, shawls, tea-things in a basket, and all the good things necessary, not forgetting the tea-kettle full of water, were put into the cart; Frisk sometimes drew; and George was preparing to act as charioteer, when he was interrupted, for a time, by the unexpected arrival of Mrs. Howard, and her children.

Though very pleased to see their cousins, the children felt rather disappointed at being stopped in their proposed pleasure; but soon recovered their spirits when their aunt and cousins agreed to join them, and expressed themselves much pleased at the idea of taking tea under the tree.

An extra quantity of good things was speedily procured; and the boys, taking the charge of the cart, set off to their destination; the girls and Miss St. Clair, going a nearer path, arrived in time to assist at the unpacking, and arranging everything in order, before Mrs. Howard and Mrs. Melville joined them. As soon as the cart was empty, it was sent back. George and Harry fixed the stakes in the ground. Tom and Walter brought the cord, and assisted in fastening them together. The kettle was then suspended by a chain and hook; the fire was lighted under it, and blazed brightly, to the great delight of the party watching it.

It appeared a long time to the children before the boiling point arrived; and Harry, to hasten the matter, poked the fire, with a large stick, very roughly, and striking the kettle unintentionally with the end, knocked it off the hook, and upset it in the middle of the fire. The whole party were very much alarmed at this sudden catastrophe, and were scattered in every direction; but, fortunately, no one was injured except poor little Rover, who was really touched by the hot water, or fancied he was, which had the same effect, and he ran howling, with his tail between his legs, to some distance. Walter followed him, but could not find the injured part; and Rover, satisfied with the sympathy he excited, got well directly. The fire was completely extinguished, and all the water was wasted; so George and Mary volunteered to go to a little spring at some distance, for another kettleful; whilst Tom and Walter prepared the fire. The

ground was so wet they could not kindle the fire on it; so Miss St. Clair found some stones, and placed them under the sticks. By the time the boys arrived with the water, a nice fire was already laid, which, on the match being applied, burnt as brightly as the other.

"Now, Harry, please not to stir this fire," said Agnes. "See, Aunt Howard and mamma are coming; let us go and tell them of our misfortune."

This was a happy thought of Agnes', as it saved the fire from the impatient management of the boys, who, on their return, were surprised to find the water boiled, the tea made, and everything ready for their evening meal.

Mrs. Howard and Mrs. Melville took the comfortable chairs provided for them; Miss St. Clair did the honours of the tea-tray (there was no table); the children placed their stools and shawls round the tray,

desiring Neptune and Rover to stay without the circle. Neptune obeyed very quietly, but Rover was not so good, for on Walter's rising to hand the cake to his aunts and mamma, the naughty little dog carried off a piece he had left in his saucer. As a punishment for this misdemeanour, Master Rover was not again allowed to come within the shade of the tree.

The children all enjoyed their tea very much. They agreed in thinking the tea was much nicer made with water boiled in a kettle over a wood fire of their own making, than that which came out of the urn; the cake and bread-and-butter were sweeter than when eaten in doors.

When they had finished their repast, the children left their aunts and mamma under the tree, and went to enjoy a good game of play. The boys challenged the girls to run a race; and, after some persuasion, they consented to run for a short distance,

a beautiful white moss rose-bud being the prize. At first the boys seemed sure of gaining, but just as they were within a few yards of the goal, Agnes, who was slight, and tall for her age, bounded forward, and, to the great surprise of the other competitors, won the race. The boys good-naturedly laughed at their awkwardness, and escorted the winner with cheers to receive the prize.

George had brought some balls with him, and they next had a game with them. In this their sisters did not join; but found plenty of amusement in watching the play. A ball, thrown by George, went the other side of the hedge. Harry, whose turn it was to catch it, ran to a gate a little distance from where it fell, and, vaulting over it, began to search for the missing ball. His playmates thinking he was a long time absent, went to see for him, and, not finding him, they called as loud as they could.

Presently, George happened to look towards an old ash tree covered with ivy, and there was the lost boy, sitting on a large branch, deliberately pulling a bird's-nest from the hollow part of the tree. George called to him to let the nest alone and come down; but Harry would not heed him, saying it was a wood-pigeon's nest, with two young ones, and he wanted them for himself. George and Walter were very much vexed to hear this, and see that Harry was so determined to have his own way, for Mr. Melville wished to encourage the wood-pigeons to build in his trees, and desired no one would disturb them. They again entreated Harry to let the poor little birds alone, as it was their papa's wish, and come down from the tree; but he was deaf to their remonstrance, and persisted in taking the nest. Finding they could not prevent it, the boys walked away (for Tom had gone to help his brother); but they had not

proceeded far when they heard a crash, and looking back, saw Harry on the ground, roaring with pain. They directly ran to his assistance, and found that he had hurt his ankle very severely. The noise made by the prostrate boy soon brought his mother and the rest of the party to the spot. At first they feared his leg was broken, but were thankful to find that, though severely strained and bruised by the fall, no bones were injured.

Mrs. Howard was very much distressed at the accident, and wished to return home as quickly as possible. As Harry was unable to walk, George brought the cart, which had just arrived to take the tea-things back, and, with the assistance of the servant, placed the poor sufferer on it, on a bed made of the shawls and ottomans.

As they were returning to the house, George could not help telling Harry he might have saved himself all this pain and

distress if he had listened to his remonstrance, and let the poor little birds alone. Harry, thoroughly subdued and humbled by suffering, acknowledged the justice of his cousin's observation, and said he would never again take a wood-pigeon's nest.

The rest of the party arrived at the house as soon as the cart; and Mrs. Howard, placing her afflicted child in the carriage in as easy a position as possible, wished her sisters and the children good evening, and drove home as fast as she could, calling for medical aid in her way.

CHAPTER IX.

This sad accident cast a gloom over the party; but, after a time, George remembered the poor little birds Harry had dropped in his fall, and proposed that, as it was yet early, they should return to the field to find them, and, if they could, replace them in the tree. Their mamma and aunt agreed to accompany them, and walk to the end of the field to enjoy the beauty of the prospect, rendered still more lovely by the brilliant rays of the declining sun.

They soon came to the scene of the accident, and, after a slight search, succeeded in finding the little birds. The nest was much disturbed, but George thought he could replace it in the tree; and, being a very good climber, he reached with ease

the branch on which Harry rested, and lowering a scarf Miss St. Clair had given him for the purpose, Agnes placed the nest and the birds in the end with great care, telling George not to draw it up too fast, and guiding the bundle past a knot in the tree with her parasol. George received it quite safely, and succeeded in replacing the nest in the same place as it before occupied, and deposited the little creatures in their habitation. He then descended in safety, and, joining the rest of the party, they proceeded towards a rustic seat, placed on a spot that commanded the most extensive view.

Mrs. Melville proposed that they should rest here for a little, and seek refreshment from the evening breeze, after the excitement of the afternoon. The children were quite tired, and glad to remain with their mamma and aunt, and enjoy a little quiet conversation. Neptune followed them;

Rover, as usual, was hunting about, trying, but all in vain, to catch the swallows that were flying almost close to the earth, in search of the crane flies that abounded in the grass.

"How silly it is of Rover to fancy he can catch those pretty birds," said Helen.

"A little exercise will not hurt him," said Miss St. Clair. "We need not fear for the swallows: they are much too rapid in their movements to apprehend any danger from the little animal. See, he will soon be tired; he is lying down panting already."

"I think," said Mrs. Melville, "the swallow is one of our most useful birds; and it is certainly as pretty as any little bird that is a native of this country. Look how gracefully they skim along, now sweeping almost to the ground after a fly, then darting into the higher regions of the air, and chasing each other with a rapidity that eludes the eye."

"You said swallows were useful birds, mamma," said Agnes; "will you tell us what good they do?"

"The swallow, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville, "lives entirely on insects, and destroys a great number in the course of the day. Without the check given to the insect tribe by the swallows and other birds, we should be overrun by these little creatures, for insects possess the power of reproducing their kind in much greater numbers than animals of the higher orders of creation. Now, my dears, I want you to observe here the wisdom and goodness of God, and the evidence of design on His part, in providing food for the little swallow, and, at the same time, creating another class of animals, full of life and enjoyment; for the insects, as has been explained in the histories I have related to you, are capable of happiness, and gratification. The air, the earth, the water, teem with delighted ex-

istence. We need only look around us this evening, and we shall see thousands of joyous beings, trying their pinions in the air, their sportive motions, their wanton mazes, their gratuitous activity, their continual change of place, without use or purpose, testify their joy, and the exultation they feel in their lately discovered faculties. Again, we know that some check is necessary to prevent the increase of these little creatures in too great proportion, and that is provided in the birds and animals that prey upon them."

"Mamma," said Walter, "whither do the swallows go for the winter?"

"Congo, Senegal, and the whole Morocco shore are visited by the swallows," replied Mrs. Melville. "Our winter is too cold for them; and as the insects on which they feed do not survive the summer, they would be unable to procure subsistence in this country."

"How wonderful it is," said Miss St. Clair, "that such little birds as the swallow should be able to fly so great a distance as it is from this country to the north of Africa."

"I think," replied Mrs. Melville, "that in the migration of birds we see exhibited, in a remarkable degree, the benevolence of their great Creator, and His unceasing care and watchfulness over the creatures of His power. The swallows come to this country for the purpose of rearing their young; and their Maker teaches them, by the instinct He has given them, the proper time to leave their winter quarters, so that they may arrive here during the genial influences of spring. Again, in the autumn, when their food begins to decrease, they are impelled by the same power to quit this country for a warmer climate, where their food is found in great abundance."

"How can they travel so far without a guide?" asked Helen.

"They have a guide," replied Mrs. Melville, "and an unerring one, in the instinct I before mentioned, that directs their flight as correctly as if they steered their course with the assistance of a compass."

"Are they not a long time on their passage?" inquired George.

"They are supposed to perform their fatiguing journey," rejoined Mrs. Melville, "in about seven days. When interrupted by contrary winds, they are sometimes seen wavering in their course, far off at sea, and alighting upon any ship they approach. They then appear spent with famine and fatigue; yet still they boldly venture, when refreshed by a few hours' rest, to renew their flight, and continue the course they had been steering before."

"Do they all go together, mamma?" asked George.

"They fly in flocks, my dear," answered Mrs. Melville; "sometimes they are more numerous than at others."

"Have you never seen them in the autumn, as they are preparing for their departure, George?" said Miss St. Clair.

"No, aunty, I do not remember to have seen them," replied George; "last autumn I was at school. But please to tell us what they do to make ready for their trip."

"When the right time to depart arrives," continued Miss St. Clair, "which is generally the middle of September, the young swallows congregate in great numbers. I have often seen a little ledge, that projects from the wall of our house, covered with birds; every now and then they would quit their position, dart into the air, taking a short flight, and then return, as if they were trying their strength."

"And no doubt they were doing so," rejoined Mrs. Melville; "they rear, in general, two broods in the year, and the latest cannot have acquired the full strength of wing the older birds possess. They

must need exercise to render them capable of sustaining such a lengthened flight."

"How many eggs do the swallows lay?" asked Walter.

"Five or six," replied Mrs. Melville. "These eggs are white, speckled with reddish brown. The swallow makes use of the artificial structures of man as retreats for shelter and breeding. Its most common and favourite place is in the interior of outhouses, open barns, or sheds, where the nest, composed of clay, and strengthened with straws or slender roots, lined with feathers, and open at the top, is placed against the rafters or wood work of the roof. The insides of chimneys, the eaves of houses, and the forsaken shafts of mines and coal-pits, are all resorted to by this little bird during the time she is rearing her young."

"What places do they choose in countries where there are no houses?" inquired Agnes.

"The swallow appears to be an attendant on cultivation," answered Mrs. Melville. "I am not aware of its natural breeding-place, but, judging from its habits in this country, it would most likely select the fissures of rocks and caves."

"I think," said Miss St. Clair, "that the swallow is one of our most favourite birds; few people like to disturb it in its resting-place. Its arrival in April is watched and hailed as the precursor of summer, and as the period when the piercing blasts of winter and spring shall have ceased for a time. They are very elegant birds, and fly with great swiftness during the fine weather. When their insect food is most plentiful, the swallows are ever upon the wing, pursuing their prey with restless activity. All smaller animals, in some measure, find safety by winding and turning, in their endeavours to escape from their enemies. The lark thus evades the pursuit of the

hawk, and in this manner insects upon the wing try to avoid the swallow, but without success, for this little bird is most admirably fitted, by its formation, to pursue its prey through their shortest turnings. Besides a great length of wing, it is also provided with a long tail, which, acting like a rudder, turns it in its most rapid motions, and thus, while it is possessed of amazing swiftness, it is also remarkable for its extreme agility."

"The peculiar fitness of every creature to the place assigned it in the natural creation is every way worthy of remark," said Mrs. Melville, "and displays the wisdom of its Almighty Creator. Thus we see that, to prevent the excessive multiplication of the insect tribes, an order of birds is produced, rendered capable, by their structure, of chasing and securing the most rapid insects as their prey. During the winter, when the insects for the most part disappear, the

birds also depart to more genial shores, to return when their food is again plentiful. In this manner to trace the goodness of God, in His works of nature, is a pleasant and profitable employment, and should raise our hearts in adoration and thankfulness to our Heavenly Father; for surely we, the beings most blessed by Him, the only creatures in His lower creation capable of knowing and loving Him, should not refuse to render to Him the praise due to His great name."

The sun was now approaching the horizon, and Mrs. Melville reminded the happy party that it was time to move towards home.

"How quickly the evening has gone," said George; "I had no idea it was so late."

"The time has passed with apparently more speed than usual," replied Miss St. Clair, "because you have been interested in

your conversation. I think we had better return to the seat at the other end of the field. It is a lovely evening; the sun will go down without a cloud. Let us stay there, and enjoy the sunset."

In retracing their steps, they passed the lime tree, and seating themselves under an ash that branched out from the hedge, they contemplated, with great admiration, the sun just sinking behind the blue mountains in the distance, and irradiating them with a flood of golden light.

"This is the sunset I most admire," said Miss St. Clair, "so peaceful and tranquil, so bright and cloudless; the orb of day descending to the horizon like a large globe of fire, and leaving a beautiful crimson glow on the landscape, a promise of as brilliant a rising on the coming morning."

"I must say I do not quite agree with you," said Mrs. Melville. "This is a beautiful sunset, but I prefer a stormy one;

there is more variety; the clouds are piled one on another in massive grandeur, some of them like mountains of snow, almost dazzling the eye with their brilliant whiteness; others dark, concealed by intervening masses from the cheering brightness of the sun's rays, and frowning in majestic grandeur, like the beetling crag of some stupendous rock. Again, some reflect the rays of the sun, as he descends, in rich colouring, casting on the hills a purple tint, and adding to the beauty of the prospect. Then the glorious luminary is sometimes obscured by a cloud ere he reaches the horizon; but, emerging from his temporary veil, he appears more brilliant from the contrast of the dark shade that for a time surrounded him, and illuminating the landscape with a gorgeous crimson beam, his last gift, he sinks from our view, to cheer other climes with his life-giving influences."

As Mrs. Melville concluded the sun dis-

appeared, and they rose to proceed on their way home. All had enjoyed themselves, and they entered the house in time to unite with Mr. Melville at the hour of prayer, to render thanks to that Almighty Being who had so mercifully preserved them through the day, and given them so many sources of enjoyment.

CHAPTER X.

Mrs. Melville sent the next day to inquire for Harry, after his unfortunate accident; and the children were much grieved to hear the sad account returned by the servant. His leg was much swollen; and the medical man had ordered a dozen leeches to be applied that morning. The poor fellow was in a great deal of pain, and quite unable to move from his bed. Mrs. Melville observed that she hoped the suffering Harry now endured would cure him of the cruel habit of taking birds' nests.

"I think it will, mamma," said George, "for, when I was bringing him home in the cart, he appeared very sorry for having disturbed the little birds."

"Let this sad accident be a warning to you, my dears," said Mrs. Melville, "not to

rob the poor birds of their young ones. Remember they have feelings as well as you. I have often been vexed to hear the distress of the parent birds at losing their brood."

"I took a nest I found in a bramble bush on the common, before I came home," said Walter; "but I did not think it was any harm, or that it would vex the old birds."

"You must have acted without thought," replied Mrs. Melville, "for if you had considered a moment, you would have been aware that it was cruel to both parties. Suppose some very large creature came and took you away from your papa and me, put you in a cage, and never allowed you to have your liberty again, do you not think we should grieve for your loss?"

"Oh! yes, mamma; I never thought of it in that way before," said Walter. "I have no wish to be taken from you and papa, or to be kept a close prisoner; and

for the future I will take care no little bird shall lose its liberty through me."

"I am glad you have made that good resolution, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville. "I hope you will keep it; for I should be very sorry if any child of mine grew up cruel and unfeeling towards the animal creation."

"How many nests do you think there are in the garden?" asked Helen.

"I am sure I cannot tell," replied Mrs. Melville.

"I counted twelve this morning, mamma," said Helen.

"Do you know the different birds that have built the nests?" inquired Mrs Melville.

"Yes, mamma," said George: "there is one of the song-thrush, with three eggs, in the laurel tree; another in the bay tree, with young ones; and a blackbird has chosen the rosemary bush for her habitation."

"There is a wren's nest in the shed, but

we are afraid of making the bird forsake it; so we do not know what is in the nest," rejoined Agnes; "and a redstart has crept through a very small hole in the wall, near the arbour; the stone is loose, so we can put our hands in; and she has five pretty blue eggs."

"I hope you do not go too often to the nests, or you will drive the birds away," said Miss St. Clair.

"Oh! no, aunty," replied Walter; "we do not look often. We only found the redstart's nest this morning. There is a robin's nest in a larger hole in the same wall; but Bobby's house is very untidy, so many dead leaves littered about, very different to the nest of the chaffinch: that is so round and neat, not a hair out of place. There are two of these in the espalier trees."

"Have you any swallows' nests in the garden?" asked Mrs. Melville.

"Yes, mamma," replied George? "there are two in the fowls' house. A linnet has taken possession of the arbutus tree, and a black-cap has chosen the ivy bush."

One morning, very early, as George was dressing, he looked out of his window and saw a magpie hopping from stake to stake, and peeping with its head first on one side and then on the other, as only a magpie can peep, into the apple trees they supported. George watched the cunning bird some time, and was much amused at its curiosity in examining the trees so minutely, and, going to work in his garden, thought no more of the magpie, or his visit.

Some time after, Helen and Walter went round to look at the nests, and to see if a chaffinch had hatched, whose fortnight for sitting expired the day before. To their great disappointment, they found the nest was in its place, but it was empty, and the old birds were crying on a pear tree near.

They ran to George to know if he had taken the little birds, or could tell anything about them, but he could give them no information. They went to find Agnes to tell her the disaster; and then they all four set off to examine the nests, and see if any more had been robbed. They found that both the chaffinches, the thrush, the blackbird, and the robin, had alike suffered. George now remembered the magpie, and told the others he knew who was the thief.

"Do tell us who it was," they all exclaimed.

"It was a very handsome gentleman, with a black and white coat," replied George.

"Did you see him, George," said Walter. "What business had he to come into the garden, and rob the poor birds? I wish I had seen him."

"And if you had seen him," answered George, "you would not have suspected that such a gentlemanly-looking fellow could

have been guilty of such bad behaviour, but would have admired him as I did."

"Catch me admiring the rascal," said Walter, with warmth. "I would have put a stick across his shoulders before he should have stolen my birds."

"Now, George," said Agnes, "you are making fun. Was it a bird or beast that took the eggs?"

"It was a magpie," replied George, laughing; "and if you had seen him as I did, hopping from stick to stick, appearing to count the leaves, your valour would have evaporated, and you would have been as much amused as I was; though, had I known the mischief he was doing, I would have driven him away."

As George wished to visit his cousin Harry, before he returned to school, his mamma kindly allowed him to ride her little pony to Leighton, and Frisk carried his young master with apparent pleasure.

Harry was much pleased to see his friend. He was still confined to the sofa, and looked pale, and as if he had suffered. George was glad to see him so far recovered; but Harry said he feared he should not be able to return to his studies this quarter, and that was a great disappointment to him, as he had hoped to have gained a prize next examination, but losing so much time would make it impossible.

George remained the day with his cousin, as the poor fellow was very glad of a companion, and, to amuse him, told the story of the magpie robbing the nests. Harry was much interested in the account. He said, his papa's gardener had found a magpie's nest, and wishing to destroy it, together with the old bird, fired at it, but missing his aim, the old bird looked out of her nest in the most impudent manner. Mrs. Howard overhearing their conversation, joined in, and related the following tale:—

"When I was a little girl, I had a tame magpie that used to follow me about the garden. Mag was very inquisitive, and would let nothing alone. I was in the bower one day, when a letter was brought me from a very dear friend. I opened it, and after reading it, put it on the seat by my side whilst I went to speak to my sister. I soon returned, but the letter was gone. I looked everywhere I could, but without success. No person had been in the arbour I was sure, for I could see it the whole time I was absent. Mag was hopping in the path in a most unconcerned manner, and my sister observed she was sure he was the delinquent. I was sorry to think so ill of my favourite, but was obliged to confess there was great reason to suspect him. The next day I was gathering some strawberries, when, on lifting a large leaf, to my great delight I saw the lost letter, which had, no doubt, been hid by the magpie."

"What a troublesome bird it must have been," said Harry; "I wonder you liked it for a pet."

After dinner George and Tom went into the garden to see Harry's tame owl; they looked in the bower where he generally lived, under every shrub, and in every place that would afford the bird any concealment, but without success. The owl was not to be found, and Tom thought it had got out of the garden, and was either killed or carried away. He was very vexed, as Harry was partial to the bird, and would be sorry at losing it in such an uncertain manner. They had given up the search, and George was looking at the flowers, and admiring a beautiful passion-flower that was trained against the wall of the hot-house, when Tom asked him if he would like to go into the house, to see some very fine plants, just come into bloom. George followed his cousin, and was much delighted

with a large cactus in full blossom, when he was startled by a loud exclamation uttered by his companion, and, looking round, he saw, to his great surprise, the owl standing on the top of a large plant, blinking his eyes, and appearing much distressed by the light.

"Oh, George! look here, see what mischief this troublesome bird has done," said Tom, taking up a bunch of beautiful scarlet flowers from under the plant on which the owl was perched; "he has picked all these blossoms off. I cannot think how he could get into the house."

"I hope," said George, "he has not injured any other plant. What a pity! I suppose he did not like the colour!"

"Then I wish he had let it alone," replied Tom; and going to the bird, he said, "Come, sir, you have done mischief enough; please to walk out."

The owl, after opening and shutting his

eyes several times, as if not comprehending the words addressed to him, and receiving an admonitory tap to make haste, from Tom, stepped slowly from the plant to a stick held close to him, and Tom carried him safely out of the house.

Harry was much annoyed at his favourite's bad behaviour, and said he thought he must part with him, as, if he did so much damage to the plants, it would not be right to keep him. It had been very warm and sultry all day, and as George was preparing to mount the pony to return, he observed a very black cloud rising in the west. He hoped the storm would not begin until he reached home; so, taking a hasty leave of his cousins, he spoke to Frisk, and was soon some way on his road. Notwithstanding his haste, before he had proceeded far the storm came on with great violence. Frisk, though in general quiet and steady, was now very much frightened at the

thunder, and started from one side of the road to the other. George was a good rider, and managed to keep his seat. He patted the neck of the terrified pony, and tried to encourage him with his voice.

In this manner they proceeded till within a quarter of a mile of home, when a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a tremendously loud and long-continued peal of thunder, brought them to a stand. George tried to induce Frisk to proceed, but in vain; the little creature appeared unable to move, and trembled in every limb. The rain was descending in torrents; and, after using all the means in his power to make Frisk go on, George dismounted, and, taking the pony's rein, walked the rest of the way. By the time he arrived at home, he was completely wet through, and covered with mud.

From the commencement of the storm, Mrs. Melville and the children had been

anxiously expecting his return, and were very glad to see him come through the gate. They ran down stairs to meet him; and Mrs. Melville, seeing he was so wet, would not allow him to wait to gratify their curiosity and answer their questions, but hurried him to his room to change his wet clothes.

The holidays were drawing to a close; and George and Walter found, to their great regret, that the next Tuesday they were to return to school. The girls were sorry to lose the company of their brothers, but their mamma cheered them with the prospect of a merry meeting at Christmas, and Miss St. Clair procured a promise from her sister that, should nothing unforeseen occur, the whole party should spend a part of the Christmas vacation with her.

The idea of again seeing their dear aunt afforded the children much pleasure, and

they commenced their preparations for departure with brighter faces.

Mrs. Melville kindly promised them a large cake to take with them, and gave orders for it to be ready by the Monday.

CHAPTER XI.

The thunder-storm having cleared the air, and imparted fresh life and beauty to the foliage (which was rather dull, in consequence of the want of rain), the children entreated their mamma and aunt to accompany them to Ferndale, as they had not been there these holidays, and wished much to visit the fish-ponds before they separated. Mrs. Melville, acceding to their request, all arrangements were completed, the pony was ready, and Miss St. Clair taking her sketch-book, they were soon on their way to Ferndale.

For some distance they proceeded up a steep hill, and then along a level road; from the height of the ground, the view they enjoyed was very extensive. On the left was a hill corresponding in elevation to



The departure for school.—P. ~~154~~. 185

the one over which their road lay. The valley between was studded with villages, richly wooded, and terminated by a range of distant mountains. On their right was another valley, of much less extent; through part of this they were to pass in their way to the fish-ponds. Leaving the turnpike-road, they entered a narrow lane, that led them down the hill in the direction of Ferndale.

The ponds were some distance from the village; and our party, diverging from the direct track into a field, and following a winding path, soon came within sight of the priory, with the ponds in a narrow vale beneath. On the first view, Miss St. Clair exclaimed at the beauty of the scene. They stood on a little rising; beneath them was the water, clear and bright, on the right; a luxuriant wood of graceful larches clothed the hill-side, their drooping branches dipping into the liquid mirror which re-

flected their elegant outline; a walk beneath their shade skirted the margin of the miniature lake, and led to a village a mile distant, called Leigh Wood. On the other side, a bank of smooth herbage, fringed with the wild iris and the water-lily, was surmounted by a splendid avenue of horse-chesnuts, and firs of a majestic growth, with now and then a silvery barked beech and a quivering aspen; through these, and in a line with the bank, a private road led to the priory. Standing on the summit of a gentle ascent was Ferndale Priory; its ornamented turrets and ivy-covered walls being almost concealed from sight by the rich foliage of the surrounding woods. At the opposite end of the valley to which they were standing was a rustic bridge, formed, with great taste, of unbarked wood; and beyond that, a sparkling waterfall completed the view, and added life and beauty to the scene.

Mrs. Melville dismounted from her little

pony, and George fastened him to a tree to prevent his trespassing, or doing any mischief. The whole party then descended the field to the edge of the pond. After walking a little to find the prettiest part for a sketch, Miss St. Clair established herself on a bank of wild thyme, and placing the book on her lap, commenced sketching the priory. Mrs. Melville took her seat near her sister, and the children wandered about as they liked. Being rather tired with their long walk, they soon returned to where their mamma and aunt were resting, and placing themselves on the bank by their side, watched the various aquatic insects that abounded in the water.

"Do you think there are any fish in this pond, mamma?" inquired George.

"Yes, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville; "this pond is made expressly for the purpose of preserving fish. If you watch, you will see them spring out of the water to

catch the flies on the surface. There! did you see that one just in front of us?"

"I saw it," said Helen; "it looked a large one; but what are those little long things, swimming under the leaves of that water lily?"

"Those are little fish," answered Mrs. Melville. "There appear to be a great number of them."

"Are there many insects living in the water, mamma?" asked Agnes.

"A great many, my love," answered Mrs. Melville. "I think the grubs of the caddis-fly are some of the most curious and interesting, from the pains they take to build themselves houses."

"Oh! mamma," said Walter, "please to tell us about them. I like so much to hear the history of insects."

"I am glad you are interested in what I relate, my dear," said Mrs. Melville. "The study of nature has to me always been a

very favourite employment. To find out the perfections and instincts of the animal creation around us, is a pleasurable occupation, but one that requires much time and patience. Of this we may be sure, that each production of nature has its proper use, and is made to fill some place in the universe that without it would be void, and thus destroy the harmony of the whole. I will now commence the history of the little worms and their habitations, as Walter is, I see, anxious for the account."

"We all wish to hear it, mamma," said Agnes.

"The grubs of the caddis-flies," continued Mrs. Melville, "live under water, where they construct for themselves moveable tents, of various materials, such as sand, stones, shells, wood, and leaves, which are skilfully joined, and strongly cemented. One kind of these grubs forms a pretty case of leaves glued together lengthwise,

but leaving an aperture sufficiently large for the inhabitant to put out its head and shoulders, when it wishes to look about for food."

"What a funny thing it must look," said Helen, "with its cloak of leaves. I should like to see one very much."

"It would be a pleasing sight," replied Mrs. Melville; "but these little worms live at the bottom of the water, and as we have at present no means of raising them, you must be content with my description. Another species employs pieces of reed, cut into convenient lengths, or bits of grass, straw, or wood, &c., carefully joining and cementing each piece to its fellow, as the work proceeds, and frequently finishing the whole by adding a broad piece, longer than the rest, to shade the door-way overhead, so that the insect may not be seen from above."

"That must be a very wise worm, mam-

ma," said Agnes, "to make a screen for itself whilst securing its prey, for that is why it constructs a lobby to its house, is it not?"

"No doubt but that is the purpose of the little creature, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville. "In thus framing its habitation it acts according to the instinct for self-preservation given it by its great Creator; for the projection of the straw over its head must hide it from the observation of the creatures above it, and materially add to its security. A more laborious structure is reared by another of these grubs, which weaves together a group of the leaves of plants into a roundish ball, and in the interior of this forms a cell for its abode. Another of these aquatic architects makes choice of the tiny shells of young fresh-water muscles and snails to form a moveable grotto."

"Are there any fish in these shells?" inquired George.

"Many of them are inhabited," answered Mrs. Melville; "but that makes no difference to the little builder, for he drags them along without mercy, keeping them close prisoners. These grotto-building grubs are by no means uncommon in ponds. One of the most surprising instances of the skill of these little creatures is the construction of their nests with small stones. The difficulty consists in making a tube about the width of the hollow of a wheat straw, or crow quill, and equally smooth and uniform throughout; the materials used being small stones, full of angles and irregularities, renders this a task of no ordinary magnitude; yet the little architects, by patiently examining the stones, and turning them round on every side, never fail to accomplish their plans. This, however, is not the only difficulty. The under surface of this tube must be flat and smooth, without any projecting angles that might impede the progress of

the little animal when dragging its habitation along the bottom of the rivulet in which it resides."

"Why does it choose to make its nest of stones," asked Agnes, "since it has so much trouble to arrange them?"

"Here again," replied Mrs. Melville, "we may trace the action of that power implanted in the nature of this little insect, by its omnipotent Creator, and notice the evidence of design; for this species lives at the bottom of streams, where, but for the weight of the materials selected for its house, it would be swept away by the current. To keep it from this danger, it is probable the grub makes choice of larger stones than it might otherwise want, and therefore cases are frequently found composed of very small stones and sand, to which, when nearly finished, a large one is added, by way of ballast. In other instances, when the materials are found to be

too heavy, a bit of light wood or a hollow straw is attached to the case to buoy it up."

"How extraordinary it is that the grub should know what things are heavy, and what are light," remarked Miss St. Clair, "and should be able to distinguish between the weight of stone and the buoyancy of wood and straws. It is a proof of the wisdom of Almighty God, that He suits the habits of creatures to the situation they occupy; for the parents of this little worm could render it no assistance, they must have quitted their habitation in the water, attained their perfect form, passed their short and happy life, before the egg containing the little insect was hatched."

"Mamma," said Helen, "how does the little grub fasten the stones for its house together?"

"By cement, my love," replied Mrs. Melville, "that is incapable of being dissolved

in water. The grubs themselves are admirably adapted for their mode of life, the portion of their bodies which is always enclosed in the case being soft and tender, while the head and shoulders, which for the most part project beyond the doorway, are firm, hard, and consequently less liable to injury."

"Do these grubs go through the same transformation as the Dragon-fly?" inquired George.

"They do," replied Mrs. Melville; "the grub I have been describing is the larva; so long as it remains in its grub state it can withdraw itself within its case of stones; but when it feels its change approaching, it contrives additional security, by weaving at the entrance of its gallery a grating of its singular silk, which hardens in water and remains indissoluble. The strong threads are made to cross each other, forming a small circular plate, perforated with

minute holes at regular intervals, which exactly fits the opening, and is placed a little within the margin."

"What are the holes for?" asked Walter.

"They are to enable the little creature to breathe," replied Mrs. Melville, "the holes admit a current of fresh water, which is used by it instead of air. It is also provided with a pair of curved mandibles, with which it is able to make its exit through the grating, and then throws them aside."

Mrs. Melville having finished the history of the Caddis-fly, they rose to pursue their way to the refreshing shade of the larch wood.

CHAPTER XII.

Proceeding through a gate into the wood, they found some beautiful moss and ferns, which the children scrambled up the bank to gather, leaving their mamma and aunt in the path. They were very busily engaged, when Miss St. Clair called to them to come down as quickly and quietly as possible. Soon obeying her, and reaching the path with as much expedition as the steepness of the bank would allow, they inquired for what purpose they had been called.

"Look there, my dears," said Mrs. Melville, pointing in the direction of the opposite bank, "do you see that thorn-tree, partly drooping into the water? On the upper branch is a little bird I want you to observe. It is a kingfisher, one of our

most richly tinted birds, and by no means common. When darting into the water in quest of prey, with the bright sunshine on its gaily-coloured feathers, it may give us some faint idea of the brilliantly plumed birds that sport in the tropical forests, flitting from place to place like so many lights in their deeply shaded recesses."

After waiting a short time, the children had a good view of the pretty little bird, as it darted from the branch into the water to capture a tiny fish, and rose with it in its bill, the drops of moisture falling from its brilliant plumage like pearls as it ascended.

"Does it feed on fish, mamma?" asked Walter.

"Yes, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville; "it is never seen far away from the sides of streams or rivers, preferring those of smaller size, not too rapid in their course. Keeping in a line with the stream, it flies

with great rapidity in an undulating manner, and with very quick strokes of the wings, the eye catching the gorgeous light of the upper parts, as the turns and windings of its mazy track bring them to view."

"Where does the kingfisher make its nest?" inquired George.

"The nest is formed in the holes of banks," answered Mrs. Melville. "The female lays six or seven eggs of a delicate transparent purplish white."

"Is not the kingfisher the same bird as that called by the ancients halcyon," asked Miss St. Clair, "that is so famed in fable, as building her nest on the water, in a few days hatching and rearing her young, and as the possessor of a charm by which she could allay the fury of the waves, till her task was completed?"

"I believe it is," replied Mrs. Melville; "the ancient poets are full of these fables, the historians are not exempt from them,

and even St. Ambrose, one of the earliest fathers of the church, has narrated the account: 'Behold,' says he, 'the little bird which in the midst of the winter lays her eggs on the sand by the shore. From that moment the winds are hushed, the sea becomes smooth, and the calm continues for fourteen days. This is the time she requires, seven days to hatch and seven days to foster her young. Their Creator has taught these little birds to make their nest in the most stormy season, only to manifest His kindness, by granting them a lasting calm. The seamen are not ignorant of this blessing, and call this interval of fair weather their halcyon days, and they are particularly careful to seize the opportunity, as they then need fear no interruption.'"

"I never knew the origin of the expression halcyon days," said George, "though I have often heard it."

"It is frequently used to express an in-

terval of rest and quiet, or of great happiness," said Mrs. Melville.

Having lost sight of the kingfisher, they proceeded through the wood and followed the path to Leigh Wood till they passed the last pond, then retracing their steps, they amused themselves by gathering a bunch of wild flowers. A beautiful festoon of the large white convolvulus, which was hanging on the drooping boughs of a larch, attracted the attention of Agnes, and she gathered a piece, but in so doing she inadvertently caught hold of a blackberry blossom, on which a humble bee was regaling itself with a repast of honey. The little insect not understanding that the squeeze it received was unintentional, very much resented it, and inflicted a sharp sting on poor Agnes' finger, at the same time buzzing as loud as possible. Agnes threw down the flowers in haste, and examining the wounded part, found that the insect had left its sting in her finger.

Mrs. Melville, seeing something was the matter, ran to her assistance and took out the sting; then gathering some plantain leaves, and bruising them, she rubbed the injured part with the juice, and in a few minutes the anguish was allayed.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Oh, mamma!" said Walter, quite out of breath from running, "I have seen such a pretty little creature; it came out of the bank, looked about for a second, and then ran across the path to the bush on the other side. What could it be?"

"What was it like, my dear?" said Mrs. Melville; "unless you give me some idea of it, I cannot tell you the name."

"It was a little long animal," replied Walter, "the upper part of its body was brown, its throat and breast were white, and its tail black; now, mamma, do you know?"

"I think," said Mrs. Melville, "from your description, the little creature must be the stoat, or ermine; for that is an elegant

animal; brown above, and white beneath, with the tail black at the end."

"I always thought the ermine was white," said Agnes; "and you called the brown creature Walter has seen, the ermine. Please to tell me what you mean."

"You have confused the summer and winter costume of the same little animal," answered Mrs. Melville; "for in summer the ermine wears a brown jacket, and in winter a white one."

"Well, that is droll," said Walter, "for the ermine to change his coat with the seasons; but why does he not wear the white jacket in summer, and the brown one in winter?"

"To answer your question," replied Mrs. Melville, "I must tell you something of the history and habits of this creature. The ermine is not so common in this country as in colder climates. It frequents stony places and thickets, amongst which it finds

a secure retreat, as its agility enables it to outstrip even the dog in a short race, and the slimness of its body allows it to enter a very small aperture. Patches of furze, in particular, afford it perfect security, and it sometimes takes possession of a rabbit's burrow."

"Does it eat the furze?" asked Helen.

"No," answered Mrs. Melville. "It preys on game, from the grouse and ptarmigan downwards; and not unfrequently attacks poultry, or sucks their eggs. It is a determined enemy to rats and mice; young hares and rabbits occasionally become victims to its rapacity, and even the full-grown animals are sometimes destroyed by it. Its motions are elegant, and its appearance extremely animated, moving by leaps or bounds. Its courage is surprising, for it will attack, seize by the throat, and cling to a grouse, hare, or other animal strong enough to carry it off. In the summer this little creature is

brown, and is then called the stoat; when the cold weather commences, the brown hairs disappear, and are replaced by white ones, growing much closer together, and warmer. By the time winter is set in it is completely clothed with yellowish white, except the tail, which continues black; then it is known by the name of ermine."

"Is it not a very expensive fur?" inquired Agnes.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Melville. "As a fur it is much valued for tippets, muffs, and other articles of winter clothing: the skins being placed side by side, with a tail fastened to each, the black of the latter contrasting agreeably with the white, or yellowish white, of the former. It is also used for lining the robes of princes, nobles, and magistrates."

"Where do all these skins come from?" asked George.

"They are imported, in great numbers,

from the northern parts of Europe," answered Mrs. Melville. "The fur brought from thence is of a much finer and denser texture than that procured in Great Britain, owing to the cold being much more intense."

"Why does this change take place?" said Agnes. "Does the variation of colour do any good to the little creature?"

"When the ermine appears in its white dress," replied Mrs. Melville, "all nature is clothed in the same: then the rivers are turned into firm ice, the ground is covered with the dazzling white of the newly-fallen snow, and this little animal would be much exposed by its bright colour, did it retain its summer costume, both to its enemies and to those animals on which it preys; but by being the same tint as the ground around, it can move without exciting the observation it otherwise would, and thus eludes pursuit, and captures its prey with greater certainty."

"I think," remarked Miss St. Clair, who till now had been too busily engaged in sketching a beautiful oak to join the conversation, "that there is another advantage to be derived from the change of colour in the ermine besides those you have mentioned, and that is, it tempers it to the weather. White is much more difficult both to heat and to cool than black: thus the white colour preserves the natural heat of the animal in winter, and the dark colour in summer, by raising the temperature of the surface, makes the creature perspire, and the evaporation which follows is a source of cold."

"In all these cases," observed Mrs. Melville, "we should remark the care the great God takes of His creatures. He opens His hand, and they are satisfied with meat. To Him the young ravens cry, and He heareth them, and regardeth their necessities. He clothes them with the various coverings

best suited to their situations, and changes both the colour and thickness of their fur according to the variations of heat and cold. Well might the Psalmist exclaim, 'O Lord! how manifold are Thy works; in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches.'"

By the lengthened shadows which fell around them, our party were reminded that it was time to think of returning; and Mrs. Melville hastened to remount her trusty little steed, which was impatiently waiting her arrival, and proceeded on her way home.

Not long after leaving the fish-ponds, they were overtaken by Farmer Goodenough and Oscar. The children expressed much delight at seeing their old friend, as they styled the faithful animal; and after all inquiries were answered, they entreated the farmer to give them a proof of the sagacity of their favourite by sending him to fetch

something. Willing to gratify their curiosity, Farmer Goodenough took up a stone, which he threw to some distance, and desired Oscar to go after it. Whilst he was obeying the command given, the farmer tied his pocket handkerchief in a ball, and hid it in a hole of the wall by the side of the road.

The dog soon returned with the stone, and delivered it to his master; who, praising him for his obedience, desired he would walk by his side. After pursuing their way for some distance, Farmer Goodenough called to Oscar, telling him he had left his handkerchief behind him, and directed the animal to seek for it, and bring it to him.

Away started Oscar at full speed, tracking the course of his master with care. The children watched him till a turn in the road concealed him from their view. They wanted to await the return of the dog, but Farmer Goodenough said he would follow

them, and as it was getting late, Mrs. Melville wished them not to delay their return home. At last, Oscar was seen approaching with the handkerchief in his mouth, and, bounding towards his much-loved master, he gave it into his hand.

The children were highly gratified by this evidence of the sagacity of their favourite; and thanking Farmer Goodenough for the pleasure he had afforded them, they parted at the cross-roads, their way being to the right, down the hill, and his to the left, over the down..

"I wish," said George, "I could teach Neptune to obey me, as well as Oscar does Farmer Goodenough: it would be so nice to send him for anything I have left behind."

"I fear," replied Mrs. Melville, "that Neptune is too old to learn any new accomplishments. I read an anecdote the other day of a North American dog, that I think

will interest you, and will show how keen the sense of smelling is in those animals, and how valuable it is when well directed, and applied to the use of man:—

"An owner of a plantation in the neighbourhood of Warwaring, near the Blue Mountains, one morning missed his youngest child, an active little fellow, only four years of age. His parents sought him everywhere in the locality without success. As the mountains abounded with wild animals, they became much alarmed for his safety, and, as is the custom in those parts, claimed the assistance and co-operation of all their neighbours in prosecuting the search for their lost child. The united party separated, and bent their way through the forest in different directions; no trace of the child could be discovered. The next day they renewed their search with no better success. The hearts of the parents were wrung with grief, and they were quite at a loss what

further steps to take for the recovery of the missing child. Providentially, at this very time, one of the native Indians arrived at the plantation, to request food and shelter for the night. On being informed of the distressing circumstances in which his host was placed, he begged that the shoes and stockings last worn by the child, might be brought. He applied them to the nose of his dog, who always accompanied him, and desired him to smell them, and then departed for the woods, accompanied by the family. Taking a circuit of a quarter of a mile, in the form of a semicircle, he urged the dog to discover the scent of the lost child. They had not proceeded far, when the dog began to bay; as he followed the scent his barks became louder and louder; at last starting off at full speed, he was soon out of sight. In half an hour he returned, with a countenance full of animated expression, from which the Indian was sure

he had discovered the child, but whether dead or alive, he could not tell. This was a moment of acute suspense, although happily of short duration. The Indian following his sagacious dog, soon reached the place, where, at the root of a large tree, lay the child. Taking the little wanderer in his arms, with a joyful heart he retraced his steps to where the distressed parents and friends were waiting, and restored the lost darling uninjured to his father and mother."

"How delighted the parents must have been to receive their lost child again," said Agnes.

"They must, indeed," replied Mrs. Melville, "and if they had any proper sense of gratitude in their hearts, they would unite in the evening prayer with greater feelings of thankfulness than they had ever before experienced."

Their conversation was terminated by

their arrival at home, much fatigued by the length of their walk.

This was the last expedition they had together, and the pleasure it afforded was the source of much converse during many days.

Before they parted, Agnes and Helen promised to continue their care of their brothers' gardens, and to write to them an account of the growth of their flowers, and of the welfare of all their pets.

At last the day of separation came, all was packed, and the boys, taking an affectionate leave of their mamma, aunt, and sisters, entered the carriage that was to convey them to the station, on their way to school. Mr. Melville accompanied them to the rail, and saw them and their boxes safely into the train.

At first the girls felt very lonely, and missed their brothers, but cheered each other with the thought that in a few months

they would be re-united; and in the mean-time they determined to attend to their studies, that they might be able to bring their share of information to enliven the family meeting.

THE END.

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